

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

AUGUST 18, 2014 | SI.COM

Sports

Must Watch



BRACKETBALL

It's Finally Here.
Football's Final Four

↓ **SI's Picks** P.76

- 1 **FLORIDA STATE**
- 2 Alabama
- 3 Oklahoma
- 4 Ohio State



The Season Of the Rebound

P.35

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THE PLAYER

USC's George Farmer

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THE PROGRAM

Florida

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XXX

THE COACH

Bobby Petrino

P.50



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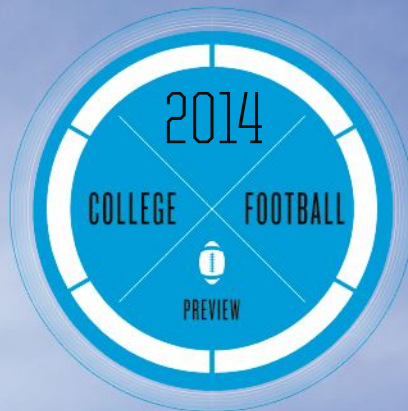
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After putting up Johnny Football-like numbers in 2013, Cato is a compelling long shot in the Heisman race.

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PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN SMITH
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED



SI HAS REGIONAL
COVERS THIS WEEK:
FROM TOP: TOM DIPACE;
KEVIN C. COX/GETTY
IMAGES; ALONZO ADAMS/
AP; JAMIE SABAU/
GETTY IMAGES; LOUIS
LOPEZ/CSM/LANDOV

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FOR AUG. 18, 2014

SI DIGITAL BONUS



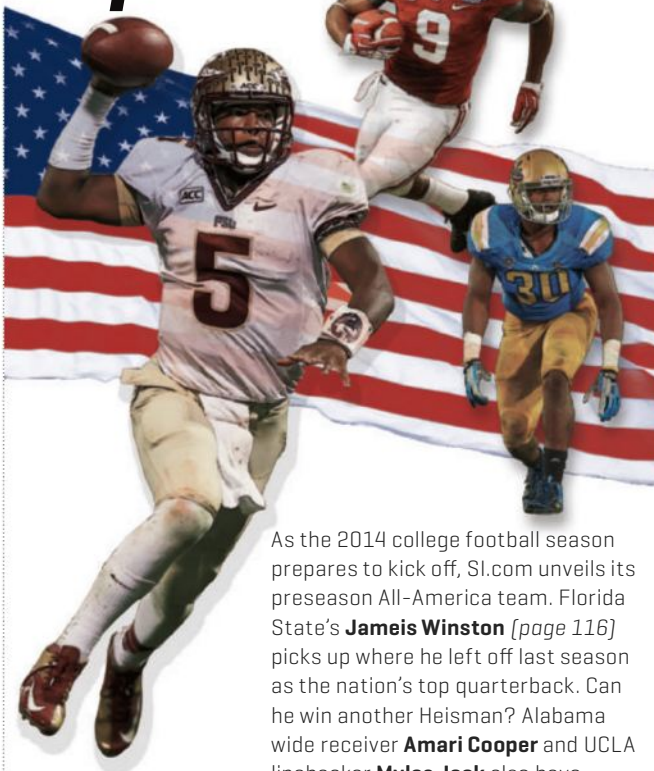
Cut Off from The Herd

From the SI Vault
Aug. 25, 1997

Seventeen years ago **Randy Moss**, the most gifted player in college football, led the revival of a Marshall program that was still haunted by a devastating 1970 plane crash. But Moss cared little about the Thundering Herd's past—and wouldn't be around for its future

By S.L. Price

All-American Express



As the 2014 college football season prepares to kick off, SI.com unveils its preseason All-America team. Florida State's **Jameis Winston** (page 116) picks up where he left off last season as the nation's top quarterback. Can he win another Heisman? Alabama wide receiver **Amari Cooper** and UCLA linebacker **Myles Jack** also have spots on the first team. Go to **SI.com/college-football** to see the complete roster of our first- and second-team selections at every position.



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to select a different team each day and challenge your friends for cash prizes or just bragging rights. To learn more, go to **fannation.si.com**

RISEINGSTARS



To see an exclusive video interview with this week's Rising Star,

Bills rookie wide receiver **Sammy Watkins**, and the entire Rising Stars series presented by Symetra, go to **SI.com/risingstars**

SI PRO-FILES

Happy Bird



As successful as some athletes are on the field, some are just as successful after the game is over. Take Orioles iron man, **Cal Ripken Jr.**, who turned his Ripken Way into a lucrative brand across youth baseball and the minor leagues. To learn more about Ripken and other athletes turned businessmen—including Jonathan Bender, Junior Bridgeman and Gary Player—go to **SI.com/Pro-Files**, a new web series by the editors of SPORTS ILLUSTRATED and FORTUNE.



Points to Ponder

Who is the top fantasy quarterback, **Drew Brees** [9] or **Aaron Rodgers**? 120 Sports hosts **Derek Rackley** and **Dave Ross** line up on different sides of the ball on this topic. Says Rackley, "I've got to go with Brees. He's been so consistent throughout his career, and I can't see that changing." But, Ross argues, "Rodgers is a gunslinger, and he just got **Jordy** [Mr. Big Contract] **Nelson** back. This is going to be a breakout year for Jordy, which means a huge year for Aaron." For more from Rackley and Ross, and 24-hour access to video highlights and analysis, go to **120sports.com** or download the free mobile or tablet app, available for iPhone or Android.



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LONG RANGE

McIlroy overpowered Valhalla, averaging 298.4 yards off the tee, best in the field.



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1
of
3Leading
Off

A Summer To Remember

■ In the heady moments after the greatest victory of his burgeoning career, just before he took possession of his latest trophy, Rory McIlroy had a couple of minutes to kibitz with his small, fiercely loyal tribe: father Gerry, who walks every hole with his son, suffering palpably; swing coach Michael Bannon, so modest and unassuming he rarely grants interviews; manager Sean O'Flaherty, a devoted lieutenant who has helped McIlroy navigate some very choppy waters; and best friend Harry Diamond, whom McIlroy often imports to tournaments to replicate a sense of normality. When someone suggested Gerry should join his son on Valhalla's 18th green for the trophy ceremony, Rory snorted, "No way—his head is getting big enough already!" McIlroy made mention of his decisive birdie on the 71st hole: "Not bad from statistically the worst fairway bunker player on the PGA Tour." Everyone began working their phones madly, and as the jocularity ebbed, McIlroy suddenly had his head in his hands and was crouched down, as if feeling the weight of history for the first time. Looking back on that moment a bit later, he said, "I was trying to gather my thoughts a little bit and just think back about what has happened this summer and what a great run of golf it's been. I was just trying to let it all sink in." ▶

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
FRED VUICH
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED



LEFT SHORT

Mickelson tried to summon some 72nd-hole magic, but he came up a shot shy.



+

2
of
3

Leading Off

What has happened is that McIlroy has reinvented the game in his image while taking his dominance to a Tigeresque level just as Woods's decline has accelerated. At last month's British Open, on a breezy, quirky course hard by the Irish Sea, McIlroy put on a show of pyrotechnics that has already passed into legend, securing the third leg of the career Grand Slam and quieting skeptics who said his game is ill-suited to links golf. Last week, at the 96th PGA Championship, McIlroy summoned the grittiest performance of his career, proving he could survive a dogfight on the most pressure-packed of Sundays. "It's the most satisfying one," he said.

McIlroy never had his best stuff across the first three rounds at soggy Valhalla Golf Club, in Louisville, but he scrapped his way to a one-stroke lead. He came out flat on Sunday, and standing in the 10th fairway, he was three off Rickie Fowler's lead and also staring up at the big-time duo of Phil Mickelson and Henrik Stenson. McIlroy proceeded to eagle the par-5 and blow everyone off the course with a flawless back-nine 32. "It was all heart," said caddie JP Fitzgerald.

With his four career major championships, McIlroy, 25, has matched the haul of Hall of Famers Ernie Els and Ray Floyd. Next on the list with five are, among others, Mickelson, Byron Nelson and Seve Ballesteros, the only European with a gift and swagger comparable to McIlroy's. Last week Jack Nicklaus opined that McIlroy could win 15 or 20 majors, but Graeme McDowell believes it's folly to put a limit on his friend's future. "He'll win as many majors as he wants," he says. ►





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3
of
3

Leading Off



McIlroy's run began in May after his breakup with tennis starlet Caroline Wozniacki just days after their wedding invitations had been mailed. He immersed himself in training—"I've got nothing else to do"—adding five pounds of muscle and honing his short-iron play. This marriage of power and finesse was never more evident than at the 508-yard 16th hole on Saturday, as McIlroy smoothed a 9-iron to within inches for a kick-in birdie. "Christ, I can't reach with a driver and three-wood," said Colin Montgomerie. "He's playing a completely different course not just from me but a lot of others too."

McIlroy next has a date with destiny at the 2015 Masters, where he will attempt to become the sixth player to complete the career Grand Slam. ("Only 242 days away," McIlroy noted on Sunday, with characteristic cheek.) His high draw sets up beautifully for Augusta National, but he's been star-crossed there ever since blowing a four-stroke Sunday lead in 2011. That painful day began his evolution into a cutthroat closer. "Look, I went protection mode once in my career, and it was the 2011 Masters," McIlroy said last week. "That didn't work out very well. So I said to myself, I'll never do that again. You know, my mind-set has stayed the same since that day at Augusta. If I'm two ahead, I'm going to try to get three ahead, and if I'm three ahead, I'm going to try to get four ahead. I'm just going to try to keep the pedal down and get as many ahead as possible."

This is not so much a course strategy as a worldview. As McIlroy proved last week, there's no stopping him now.

—Alan Shipnuck

SPOTLIGHT

McIlroy, who shared a hug with Gerry (above right), became the fifth player to win multiple majors in a season before age 26.

INBOX

FOR AUG. 4, 2014

► **Bud Selig** has clearly mistaken change for progress. A 162-game season should not have a 10-team postseason. His legacy for many fans is one of slow progress and shortsighted changes.

Nick Straatmann, Linn, Mo.

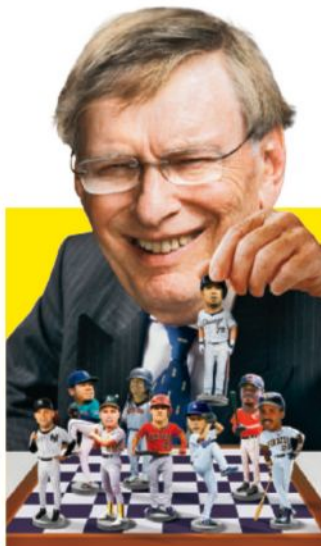
Before we canonize **Selig**, let's look at a few things that happened under his watch that nearly ruined baseball for a lot of fans: the steroid era; cancellation of the 1994 World Series due to the players' strike; and using the outcome of the All-Star Game to determine home field advantage in the World Series.

Joe Dominick, Archdale, N.C.



I loved Dan Patrick's Q&A with Jeremy Lin, whose play and attitude changed me from a die-hard NFL fan to a huge NBA fan. He is humble, intelligent and talented—an all-around class act.

Peg Augustyn Andrews
McCook, Neb.



I really enjoyed Sam Eifling's *Cowboy Christmas*. It took me back nearly 20 years, to when I interviewed some cowboys at the Monroe (Mich.) County Fair. One of my favorite quotes was from a cowboy named Brian Tucker who said, "The cowboy in America is pretty much the closest thing to freedom left in the world today."

Gary Winkelman
Sterling Heights, Mich.



COVER

FACEBOOK

Joe McGrath
Thanks for the regional cover story on UCLA quarterback Brett Hundley. I know it's not a popular choice in L.A., but I hope he heads to Dallas next year to take up where Troy Aikman left off!

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SCORECARD

It looks as if the league is more concerned about minor infractions in college (five-game suspension for free tattoos) than an NFL player who was charged with assaulting his fiancée (two games). How does this make sense?
Mike Patterson
Tyler, Texas

PAGE
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POINT AFTER

Once again **Phil Taylor** hit the bull's-eye, this time with his clear and eloquent call for the NFL to come out of the dark ages on domestic abuse. Note to John Harbaugh: You're wrong. It is a big deal.
Keith Muntyan
Sharon, Mass.



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AUGUST 22

Edited by / JIM GORANT / TED KEITH

+ Scorecard

THE 2039

EDITION of the
Slive-Delany

March Madness Cup Presented by Uber is upon us. Looking back, it's hard to pinpoint precisely when the NCAA men's basketball tournament ceded supremacy as college hoops' capstone event. But it happened, just as the NIT long ago yielded to the NAAs, and don't things that come to pass have a way of seeming inevitable in retrospect? So follow along as we trace just how college sports got here.

Football had always been an enterprise unto itself, ruled by an oligarchy content to ignore the arriviste mid-major. Yes, Appalachian State beat Michigan in 2007, but that game signified little in a sport where only the elite could go to a meaningful bowl game. Yet basketball was different once upon a time. For decades the NCAA tournament benefited from a kind of mutually-assured construction: Big schools offered up their names, followings and Goliath profiles; smaller



Members Only

A pair of landmark decisions will forever change the look of the NCAA, especially its signature event **BY ALEXANDER WOLFF**

ones got a shot at the role of David, with the chance of an upset guaranteeing that attention would be paid. But two decisions, rendered on back-to-back days 25 years ago, broke the equilibrium that had made the Big Dance the perfect sporting event.

The first, a vote by the NCAA's board of directors on Aug. 7, 2014, permitted the 65 schools in the five

most powerful conferences to fold several thousand extra dollars annually into scholarships to better reflect "the full cost of attendance." A day later U.S. chief district judge Claudia Wilken, in her decision in *O'Bannon v. NCAA*, ruled that schools that used players' names on jerseys and likenesses in video games had to guarantee an athlete at

least \$5,000 a year in licensing revenue, paid into a trust fund that could be tapped once he used up his eligibility. Those developments would disfigure the NCAA tournament. And it all happened the way Hemingway described going broke—gradually, then suddenly.

Indeed, the other 286 Division I members soon

met with financial ruin. Post-2014, when a mid-major recruiter offered a scholarship covering just tuition, books and room and board, prospects would laugh him out of the living room. And when the big boys bumped up their support every few years—"Just keepin' up with inflation," cracked Birmingham pork-rind baron Jocko Broadwad in '18—other schools were forced to follow, or at least try to. First with cash. Then with cars and clothes, because those are part of "the full cost of attendance" if a college bro's to be taken seriously. Meanwhile, the efforts of the 27 other leagues to consummate jersey and video-game deals were unavailing. Anyone condemned to play for a mid-major knew that his school had a Billiken's chance in hell of delivering any trust-fund cash upon graduation.

So the unraveling of the NCAAs continued apace. Such former mid-major powers as Butler, Gonzaga and VCU, with no football revenue or windfall from massive TV contracts, lapsed into mediocrity. Schools like Princeton, Bucknell and Mercer, vanquishers respectively of UCLA, Kansas and Duke during Marches past, made a mess of their tournament cameos. With the upset virtually gone from the NCAAs, CBS drastically cut back its rights payments. A cluster of buildings in downtown Indianapolis have served



as Section 8 housing ever since the NCAA moved what was left of its operations to Bangalore.

What marked the moment when things came completely a cropper? Some historians point to the eclipse of two schools that once belonged to a league called the Big East, Georgetown and Villanova, contestants in perhaps the most memorable NCAA final of the 20th century. With no football TV deal, neither could even afford to take a priest for the bench on road trips and both fell into irrelevancy.

By then the nonscholarship schools of the Ivy League had seen enough. Alarmed by the adoption of an SEC proposal to supply every football and men's basketball player with an amanuensis so he could simply dictate irritating term papers, Harvard president Chelsea Clinton sniffed, "We already ask our athletes to pay their own way. Now we're supposed to compete with schools that don't require athletes to write?"

Oh, back in 2014 a few clairvoyants saw the decline

Midnight for Cinderella?

Shockers like Bucknell's 2005 upset of Kansas could become a thing of the past.

coming. They decried the disconnection of it all from even the most expansive definition of education. Pointed out the lunacy of more professionalization when only 20 athletic programs ran in the black. Foresaw the brawls between men's nonrevenue sports and women's programs midwived by Title IX over fewer and fewer scraps of funding. Called out the hypocrisy of the NCAA leadership—which trumpeted dedication to "fair" and "equitable" competition in its statement of "core purpose"—for letting the conferences that already enjoyed every advantage, from extravagant training tables to palatial athletic dorms, claim an even more pronounced edge. Instead of paying another assistant football coach a million-plus a year, the haves might have kicked a little of their bounty back to the NCAA, to be redistributed to the have-nots in the name of competitive equity. But despite the

howls of populist radio host Paul Krugbaum, the crusade against inequality went nowhere.

And so fans steadily abandoned the event that had once been known, simply and definitively, as "the tournament." It was one thing for Cinderella to go to the dance but quite another for her to show up wearing a barrel, her feet too dirty for crystal footwear. As lower seeds suffered blowouts every March, it became rare for a secretary to fill out an office pool bracket. By 2031 most of the 27 lesser leagues cried uncle and fled for refuge in Divisions II and III.

Enter the Slive-Delany Cup. Five years ago it even delivered what people had waited decades to see: a 16th seed knocking off a No. 1. That it wasn't Yale beating Kentucky, but rather Clemson topping Baylor, took some shine off the moment. As did the Tigers' victory coming after the Bears' starters missed tip-off when their stretch Hummer got hung up in game-day gridlock on the strip in Las Vegas, which the Student-Athlete Welfare Committee of the rump NCAA had successfully lobbied the Slive-Delany to use as a first-round site.

But, hey, it is what it is. Sixty-five schools make for integrity—of the numerical kind, anyway. It's enough to fill out a draw that a whiskered basketball fan would recognize: a field of 64, with one entry to spare. Just in case some school gets sidelined by the APR. □

MOTOR SPORTS

+

Kevin Ward Jr.

1994-2014



HIS WAS A

common backstory in pro racing:

go-karts at age four, a move to 270-horsepower sprint cars at 12, another climb to 360-hp sprints at 16. And of course Kevin Ward Jr. won at every level. It's hard to say how far the 20-year-old might have gone, but there was something in Ward's demeanor that announced him as a racer not inclined to back down.

In a blink, Ward's competitive fire led him to a tragic end last Saturday at the Empire Super Sprint, a 25-lap oval dirt-track race in Canandaigua, N.Y. Joining Ward in the 22-car field was three-time Sprint Cup champ Tony Stewart, who frequently enters small-time events at dimly lit tracks, an elite driver banging in the grass-root trenches of his sport.

When Ward tried to pass Stewart early in the 14th lap,



SI.com

Get the latest on Tony Stewart's future at SI.com/racing

Stewart squeezed him into the wall, puncturing Ward's right rear tire and ending his evening. As soon as the caution flag waved, Ward jumped from his car and stomped down the track to confront Stewart. One car, right in front of Stewart's, swerved to avoid hitting Ward. Stewart, though, made contact as he went by: Ward was briefly dragged beneath Stewart's car and then thrown 50 feet toward the top of the track. He was shuttled to a nearby hospital and pronounced dead 45 minutes later. Ontario County sheriff Philip Povero is investigating but says the inquest is not criminal and

that Stewart, who appeared very upset, cooperated fully.

No top series NASCAR drivers have been killed since Dale Earnhardt Sr.'s accident at Daytona in 2001, but an average of 15 racers a year have died in dirt-track races since '01. The disparity can be explained by inferior driving equipment and track safety procedures, and also by a culture that glorifies driver confrontations. Ward would likely have been spared had he stayed in his car. There is a sense among drivers and fans that success requires the sort of edginess that propelled Ward onto the track. If the racing community, from NASCAR on down, fails to use this incident to address that misconception, the tragedy will be multiplied.

—Andrew Lawrence

+ THEY SAID IT

"I think it was 18 or 19 or 20. I knew it was one of those three."

Matt Shoemaker

Angels pitcher, after getting the win in a 19-inning marathon against the Red Sox that started last Saturday night and ended early Sunday after 6 hours and 31 minutes.



+ GO FIGURE



366

WEIGHT OF FORMER NFL QUARTERBACK **Scott Mitchell**, WHO WILL BE A CONTESTANT ON THE NEW SEASON OF NBC'S *THE BIGGEST LOSER*. THE AVERAGE WEIGHT OF THE LIONS' STARTING OFFENSIVE LINEMEN WHO PROTECTED MITCHELL IN 1997, HIS LAST YEAR AS A FULL-TIME NFL STARTER, WAS 300.8 POUNDS.

3

Hits allowed by 13-year-old girl **Mo'Ne Davis** in an 8-0 shutout on Sunday that sent her Philadelphia-area team to the Little League World Series.



2 Times **Tiger Woods** has failed to make the cut at the PGA Championship, the first major he has missed multiple times. Woods also missed in 2011. **In all he has gone home after two rounds just four times in 66 major starts as a professional.**

138

Record number of goals scored in Major League Soccer by **Landon Donovan**, who announced last week that the 2014 season will be his last.





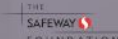
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Bucket List

The man behind the Ice Bucket Challenge lists the five athletes he wants to see get wet



IT'S ALMOST

impossible to go on Facebook lately without seeing videos of posters dumping ice water over their heads. It's the #icebucketchallenge, and those who are challenged have 24 hours either to donate \$100 to research for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis or to take the challenge themselves; if they do, they can challenge three friends.

It has become a phenomenon thanks in part to Pete Frates, a former Boston College baseball captain who has become a minor local celebrity since being diagnosed with ALS



Boston Strong

Frates, a former centerfielder at BC, threw out the first pitch at Fenway Park's ALS Night on May 30, 2012.

(also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease) in 2012. Frates's involvement helped lead to a flurry of donations to the ALS Association, which received more than \$1 million last weekend; the same time period last year brought in less than \$10,000.

Because of the illness, Frates uses eye-tracking software to communicate; he emailed SI the five athletes he'd most like to see take the challenge. —Stephanie Apstein



KEN GRIFFEY JR.

The former Mariners star "will always be my favorite player. I'd love to see him join in."



DEREK JETER

"This would be a great chance for the current Yankees captain to honor a past one."



TOM BRADY

Frates already challenged Brady once, but the QB has yet to accept.



MICHAEL JORDAN

He may be the greatest basketball player of all time, but could he stay cool doing this?



BOBBY ORR

The legendary Bruin was "the best on the ice. He'd be great pouring it on his head!"



BREAKOUT PERFORMER

HOT

Kevin Love

Once upon a time being called "the Chris Bosh of Cleveland" was an insult, not a goal.

Derek Jeter

Passed Honus Wagner for sixth on hits list (3,431). Headline: IMPENDING RETIREE BEATS OLD MAN.

Linval Joseph

D-lineman left Giants for Minny, where he was grazed in a nightclub shooting. Is this why Kevin Love wants out?

NCAA

Shouldn't the NFL and NBA chip in now that you're paying the employees in their minor leagues?

The Cowboys

Party bus rave with the head of refs was a neutral-zone infraction, possibly an illegal procedure.



NOT

+ SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

The Falcons will sell **alcohol-infused cupcakes** at the Georgia Dome this season.





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WAKE UP TO EGGS



1-MINUTE HAM & EGG BREAKFAST BOWL

PREP TIME 15 seconds
COOK TIME 45-60 seconds
SERVINGS 1 serving

INGREDIENTS

- 1 thin sliced deli ham (1 ounce)
- 1 egg, beaten
- Shredded cheddar cheese

DIRECTIONS

- Line the bottom of an 8-oz ramekin or custard cup with ham slices, folding ham in half if necessary. Pour egg over ham.
- Microwave on high, 30 seconds; stir. Microwave until egg is almost set, 15 to 30 seconds longer.
- Top with cheese. Serve immediately.



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COLLEGE FOOTBALL

+

Hungry Huskers

Nebraska tries eating its way to the top



IF NEBRASKA FOOTBALL players know how to drive, then they know how to eat. At least that's been the case since March, when Ryan Reist, 35, joined the school as assistant director of sports nutrition. Reist creates individual meal plans based on a player's age, height, weight, body-fat percentage, resting metabolic rate (how many calories he'd burn if he rested for 24 hours) and, most important, his on-field goals. And he does it using an easy-to-follow traffic-light labeling system: **red** for comfort foods higher in fat and calories, **yellow** for more processed, less nutrient-dense options and **green** for lean and protein-rich choices.

To ensure that players are staying on track, Reist, a registered dietician who worked at Alabama's 2012 fall camp, labels foods to indicate the macronutrient breakdown (one scoop of whole-wheat pasta has 98 calories and 20 grams of carbs, etc.) and serving size.

But unlike the standard red-yellow-green code, Reist's food signals convey different messages for each Nebraska player. For defensive end Randy Gregory (*above*), red means go. The junior needed to gain 20 pounds after the spring season, so Reist upped his daily intake to between 4,500 and 6,000 calories a day. "I gave him a schedule of when and what to eat," says Reist. "His plate is half starchy carbs, 25% protein and 25% fruits and vegetables." While Gregory met his goal weight and came in under 10% body fat—"probably the leanest guy on the D-line"—sophomore Vincent Valentine needed to lose 10 pounds. Reist advised the defensive tackle to cut extra calories by swapping sports drinks for flavored water and greasy fast-food fare for healthier menu items or home meals.

"We make small changes with them each day so over time it will make a difference," says Reist. "It's a constant message so they can move toward their goal."

—Jamie Lisanti

EDGE

For a more in-depth look at sports and nutrition for football, visit SI.com/Edge



BLACKENED SHRIMP PASTA

Comfort foods, casseroles and pasta dishes like chicken and broccoli alfredo that are high in fat and calories are considered red foods.



AU GRATIN POTATOES

Menu items that have a bit more nutritional value and protein but still a significant amount of fat (like lentils with andouille sausage) have a yellow label.



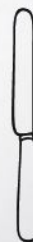
GRILLED FISH

Green foods like mahimahi, vegetables and quinoa are the healthiest options, providing high protein and very little fat.

JOE ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES (GREGORY); LAURI PATTERSON/GETTY IMAGES (PASTA); ROB WHITE/TASTYART.LTD (POTATOES); RICHARD RUDISIL/GETTY IMAGES (FISH)



WAKE UP TO EGGS



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DETERMINATION

Victory After Tragedy

■ **The omnium** is a six-part track cycling competition that demands speed, strength and endurance. For women's juniors the events range from a 500-meter time trial and a 10-km points race to a 2,000m individual pursuit. For Kirsten Williams, who won the 17–18 age group omnium at USA Cycling's junior track nationals in Carson, Calif., in June, the event also required a lot of heart. Seventeen days earlier her father Victor, 51, was killed after a collision with another cyclist at the Olympic Training Center Velodrome's weekly summer race series in Colorado Springs. Kirsten, who trained alongside her father and was on the track when the crash occurred, said her title, which earned her a trip to the junior worlds in Seoul last week, was for her dad. "I wanted to honor him and have his legacy of strength and tenacity live on," she said. —A.F.


C.J. Cummings | *Beaufort, S.C.* | *Weightlifting*

C.J., a freshman at Beaufort High this fall, became the youngest lifter—at 14—to set a senior U.S. record with a clean and jerk of 153 kilograms [337.3 pounds] in the 62-kg class [136.7 pounds] at nationals in Salt Lake City. Earlier this year he won the all-around titles at Youth Pan Ams [62-kg] and youth nationals [ages 14 to 15, 69-kg].


Caitlynn Moon | *DeKalb, Ill.* | *Swimming*

Moon, who will swim for Texas A&M as a freshman this year, won the 1,500-meter freestyle at YMCA long course nationals in Indianapolis in 16:40.05, smashing the YMCA record [below college level] by 19.42 seconds. She also set a YMCA mark in the 800 free [8:49.29] and won the 200 free [2:02.62]. Moon competes for the DeKalb County Swim Team.


John Driscoll III | *Ridgewood, N.J.* | *Golf*

John, 13, an eighth-grader at George Washington Middle School this fall, beat Garrett Mooney [Westfield] 5 and 4 to become the youngest golfer to take the New Jersey State Golf Association's boys championship. A week earlier he won the New Jersey Junior PGA University Open, shooting a career-low 66 at Princeton's golf course, followed by a 77 at Rutgers.

Faces in the Crowd

→ | Edited By **ALEXANDRA FENWICK**


Brooke Wilmes | *Johnston, Iowa* | *Softball*

Brooke, a freshman shortstop at Johnston High, hit a second-inning grand slam, drove in five runs and scored four times to lead the Dragons to a 10–2 victory over Southeast Polk High for the state 5A championship. Named captain of the all-tournament team, the rising sophomore batted .538 this season and was a repeat all-state selection.


Gabriel Wittosch | *Duluth, Ga.* | *Fly-fishing*

A rising freshman at Georgia, Wittosch won gold at the world youth championships on the Dunejac River in Nowy Sącz, Poland, to lead the six-man U.S. team to victory in an eight-team field. He caught 59 trout and grayling, the longest measuring 46.1 cm [18.1"], for 41,520 points. The U.S. reeled in 262 fish, 72 more than runner-up Poland.


Kristen Gillman | *Austin* | *Golf*

Kristen, a junior-to-be at Lake Travis High, shot a tournament record 16-under 268 to win the Junior PGA Championship at Miramont Country Club in Bryan, Texas, by 11 strokes. She held sole possession of the lead in every round and earned a spot on this year's U.S. Junior Ryder Cup squad. Kristen has verbally committed to Alabama.

Nominate Now ▼

To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd, go to SI.com/faces. For more on outstanding amateur athletes, follow @SI_Faces on Twitter.



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Do you know someone who has what it takes to wear the red jacket? SI Kids is taking nominations for SportsKid of the Year, someone who excels not only on the field, but in the community and classroom as well.

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Fill out a nomination form at

SIKIDS.COM/SKOTY



Just My Type

→ Interview by **DAN PATRICK**

DAN PATRICK: Is “seven-time winner of the Tour de France” still the correct way to introduce you?

LANCE ARMSTRONG:

It depends.

DP: Do you believe you are?

LA: I do. I don't like arguing or fighting about it. You ask me, I say yes. I know well there are many, many people who don't agree with that.

DP: Could you have done it differently, given the way you're wired?

LA: Which part?

DP: Your desire to win seems pretty ingrained . . . going back to your battle with cancer.

LA: The whole process of surviving the disease, of being so motivated to win that battle, I took that back into the sport. I viewed winning and losing as life or death. I hadn't had that before. My issue was, off the bike I sometimes crossed the line. I didn't have a switch to turn it off. It's one thing to kick ass in training or races. You're sitting in a press conference, you don't need to kick ass.

DP: Could you have won without doping?

LA: Not in that era. It was an arms race at the time. There were no tests. You couldn't detect certain things like you can now. I don't know about today. I suspect you



LANCE ARMSTRONG

REGRETS? A FEW

The former racer, 42, laments how he often behaved—off the bike. He lives out of the spotlight in Aspen, Colo., and was grand marshal of a motorcycle rally in Sturgis, S.D., on Aug. 4.

could today. Not from the late '80s to the mid-2000s.

DP: Was it worth it?

LA: It's easy to look back and say I'd do certain things differently. It's been a bloodbath the last couple of years. It was a decision we all made in the mid-'90s when we went over there. We went over for a knife fight. Lo and behold, the rest of them had guns. A lot of us young Americans just said, I'm not going to sit here and get my ass kicked. And I'm not going home. I'm going to gear up and fight. I have a lot of regrets about how I handled myself—my behavior, my reactions, my interactions—and I've tried to make amends for that.

DP: Did you ever come close to admitting what you were doing?

LA: Never.

DP: Why did the French dislike you so much?

LA: I didn't do myself any favors. I was very combative with them. They smelled blood in the water. The media are going to pounce on that. While all this was going on, the landscape of the media drastically changed. We went from having just a few outlets to having Twitter.

DP: If you walked down the Champs-Élysées with your yellow jersey on. . . .

LA: [Laughs.] I don't think I want to do that.

DP: It would be that bad?

LA: It might. I'll let you walk down the street with it first, and let me know how it goes. □

Guest Shots Say What?



Duke coach **Mike Krzyzewski** disagrees

with critics who think playing international basketball hurts players. “A great player wants to play against great competition,” he said. “In constantly seeking that competition, you get better. That sets you apart. Every player who has played for us over the last eight to nine years has benefited from it.” . . .



John Daly explained why he reached

out to golfer Dustin Johnson, who is on a sabbatical for personal reasons. “I’m seeing a lot of me in Dustin,” Daly said. “I wasted [my talent] in the '90s. I don’t want to see this guy waste his. I think there are majors in his future.” . . . Falcons quarterback **Matt**



Ryan wants to make it clear

he wouldn't run the slowest 40 of any QB in the NFL. “I’m pretty sure I could beat Tom Brady and Peyton Manning,” Ryan said. “I got two off the list. From there on out, it’s pretty questionable.”

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baseball game that will
Be fixed on sunday.



Sept. 16, 2012 From: VIP Sports

My best friend is pitching
name is **jeff locke**. he will



Sept. 16, 2012 From: VIP Sports

Tell your biggest people that
pirates game today is fixed. My
friend will be throwing this game.

YOU CAN'T MAKE THIS STUFF UP

Snubbed on Facebook by a childhood friend turned Pirates pitcher, a small-time handicapper concocted a game-fixing tale that grabbed the attention of MLB investigators. They were not amused. And then things got scandalously weird

today for the pirates. His not have a good day today

CONSPIRACY OF ONE

A lack of contact with Locke didn't stop Barr (insets) from sending texts saying the fix was in when the Pirates' lefty took the mound.



IN THE WANING DAYS of the 2012 major league season, Niki Congero received an unusual text message. It came from a man she had never met—a sports handicapper who for a couple of weeks had been texting unsolicited betting tips to her cellphone.

“LOL,” wrote the man, who identified himself as James Hunter from VIP Sports. “I got a baseball game that will be fixed on Sunday.”

Congero, a co-owner of a recording studio in Las Vegas, had celebrity connections. She was hosting an upcoming charity event at the Mirage hotel featuring reality-TV stars and figured the handicapper was offering her free tips because he had pegged her as a conduit to high-profile clients.

At first the tips were nothing special, Congero told The Center for Investigative Reporting. Then the handicapper guaranteed her a winner in the Sept. 16 game between the Pirates and the Cubs at Wrigley Field. “My best friend is pitching today for the pirates,” Hunter texted. “His name is Jeff Locke. He will not have a good day.” In a later text he wrote, “Tell your biggest people that Pirates game today is fixed. My friend will be throwing this game.”

Pittsburgh jumped out to an early lead behind Locke, a late-season call-up. While the Bucs were ahead, Congero says, the handicapper phoned her, acknowledging that the game wasn't going the way he had predicted. He implied that he was in touch with the lefthander even as the game was under way.

“I talked to my friend the pitcher, and he said he was going to make it right,” Congero remembers him saying.

Sure enough, in the bottom of the fifth inning, Locke fell apart. In a span of eight pitches he gave up a home run, a single, another

home run and another single, shrinking the Pirates' lead from 6-1 to 6-5. He left the game, and Pittsburgh went on to lose 13-9.

People who bet on the Cubs made money. But Congero wasn't among them. She found the idea of a fixed baseball game deeply disturbing, and she wanted the handicapper investigated.

All over the country, people who bet on baseball in the fall of 2012 began hearing that Locke and a mysterious handicapper were fixing Pirates games. Like Congero, some complained. Those reports sent shivers through Major League Baseball, prompting a probe of unusual scope and intensity: MLB's own investigators and organized-crime detectives from the



By
**Lance Williams
and Brian Tuohy**

The Center for
Investigative
Reporting

Photograph by
**Rob Foldy/
Getty Images**

WILL SEBERGER
(BARR); PHOTO
ILLUSTRATION BY
SI PREMEDIA

New York City Police Department were deployed to learn the handicapper's identity and unravel the plot.

Before it was over, their investigation would lead to a tense standoff by the side of an Arizona desert road, where more than a dozen armed officers confronted two frightened young women with a baby in an effort to track down James Hunter. The outcome would hinge on separating fact from fantasy in the interpersonal dynamics between two former youth-baseball teammates from a small New England town—one of whom grew up to become a major league pitcher, the other a sports gambler.

TINY AND SCENIC Conway, N.H., is 30 miles south of Mount Washington, the highest peak in the Presidential Range. It's the birthplace of Jeff Locke, 26, a baby-faced lefthander who for the last two seasons has been a fixture in the Pirates' rotation. In 2013 he even made the National League All-Star team.

Conway was also the boyhood home of Kris Barr. He is 27, a tall, brash man with close-cropped hair, a hint of a Southwestern drawl and a record of minor arrests for marijuana possession and fighting. On Facebook, Barr, who sometimes goes by the alias James Hunter, calls himself "the best sports handicapper on the planet."

Barr's family moved to Conway from Boston when he was a baby. He recalls a wonderful childhood there and has especially fond memories of Locke, the son of a onetime local prep-baseball star—and, he says, his best friend. The boys met in grade school. For a time they were inseparable, Barr recalls. "Back in the day, there would be sleepovers every weekend, and we'd always be active, running around like kids do," he says.

As a kid Barr could throw hard, and he became a "very good player" in Babe Ruth League, recalls former coach Peter Pelletier: "He pitched and played first base or anywhere you want." Locke was a star as well, a lefthanded slugger who could hit the ball out of the park. The boys played on opposing teams during the regular season but were teammates—and, Pelletier says, friends—on the postseason Mount Washington Valley All-Stars.

In 1998, when Barr was in sixth grade, his mother won the New Hampshire lottery's \$1,000-per-week Cash for Life prize. Winters are fierce in Conway. The family thought of moving to Phoenix but landed 90 miles north in Prescott Valley, Ariz. Barr lost touch with his New Hampshire friends, including Locke.

In the years that followed, Locke became the greatest high school pitcher anybody in Conway had seen. As a sophomore he threw two no-hitters, one a perfect game. As a junior he

pitched a five-inning no-hitter in which all the outs were strikeouts. He was twice voted the best player in the state by New Hampshire's largest newspaper. He finished high school with a record of 34–2 and an ERA of 0.49, and after graduating in 2006 he was drafted by the Braves in the second round and signed for a \$650,000 bonus.

On the other side of the country, Barr had stopped playing baseball when he was 16 and had gotten into sports gambling. At first he helped his father place bets online. Then, at 17, Barr took out ads on online gaming sites and began selling tips.

Today Barr lives in Prescott Valley with his girlfriend and baby and helps run a sports memorabilia shop. But the business of betting often requires him to make the 250-mile drive to Las Vegas. He says much of his income comes from selling tips on his website, VIPSportsInvestment.com, on which he handicaps basketball, baseball and especially the NFL. The site says it is "for serious gamblers only." Tips are delivered via text message or email. Barr says he doesn't book bets. Clients can place them with the sports books in casinos, with illegal bookmakers or with the plethora of online betting sites run out of the Philippines or Costa Rica.

Handicappers must learn to ride an emotional roller coaster. In 2012, Barr says, he hit "22 NFL games in a row on the spread" and was flying high. But losing streaks are brutal because they cost you clients—and because, as Barr puts it, "some people take gambling real seriously."

"If I have a bad weekend and I lose a couple of thousand for somebody . . . I've heard of people being shot over something like that," he says.

To ensure that angry clients cannot find him, Barr says he doesn't always use his true name or address. On the VIP Sports site he's identified as James Hunter. When he filled out the paperwork to create the site, Barr gave his name as James Jones. He listed a postal address that no gambling client would associate with him—the house in New Hampshire where he lived as a 12-year-old.

Over the years Barr tracked Locke's minor league career: three seasons in the Braves' organization, then a 2009 trade that brought him to the Pirates' system. By then social media had exploded. Before the 2011 season Barr messaged Locke on Facebook. No reply.

Barr's brother Don, who also knew Locke from youth baseball, messaged the pitcher as well. At first the Facebook exchanges were friendly, but then Locke's tone changed. "He said, 'All you want is to be my friend because I play for the



CIR

This story was produced by The Center for Investigative Reporting, a non-profit media organization based in the San Francisco Bay Area, in collaboration with SPORTS ILLUSTRATED. Learn more about CIR at cironline.org. Contact the reporter at twilliams@cironline.org.

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From Little League to the big leagues
 The extraordinary journey of Jeff Locke

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The gambler carried a grudge against his former friend: "I said, if he ever makes it to the big leagues, I'm betting against him every time."

August he got another big league shot. He pitched in two games out of the Pittsburgh bullpen, then started a Sept. 3 home game against the weak-hitting Astros. In the fifth inning, with two men on base, he hung a curveball to infielder Brett Wallace. Wallace hit it out of the park, and the Pirates lost 5-1.

Sweet! Barr thought. After that he began picking Pittsburgh to lose whenever Locke pitched. No research was involved. "He was just pitching, and I was hoping he gets rocked,"

Barr says.

Remembering the lack of interest in the Pirates' game he handicapped the previous year, Barr decided to up the ante: He advertised his picks by claiming that he and Locke were conspiring to fix the games. "I was telling everybody . . . 'I just talked to him and he's throwing this game,'" Barr says.

On Sept. 9, Barr picked the Cubs to beat the Pirates. In the fourth inning Locke threw an 89-mph fastball, and Josh Vitters hit it over the leftfield fence. Two batters later Locke threw an identical pitch to Anthony Recker. He hit it out to center. The Cubs won 4-2. It was the same story in the Pirates-Cubs game on Sept. 16, the one Barr had touted to Niki Congero: Locke was shelled and Chicago won.

Before a Sept. 21 start against the Astros, Barr predicted Locke would "get hit early and often." Locke gave up a three-run homer in the first inning and Houston won 7-1. The gambler predicted Locke would take another beating in the Pirates' Sept. 26 game against the Mets in New York. Locke gave up nine hits in 3⅓ innings and the Mets won 6-0. Then, for Locke's final start of the season, Oct. 1 against Atlanta, Barr switched it up, predicting a win. "I told everybody, He's going to pitch his heart out 'cause he wants to get his first win against the team that drafted him," he says. Locke and the Pirates beat the Braves 2-1.

For five games in a row, and usually against the odds, Barr had accurately predicted Locke's starts. Barr repeated his story of fixing games to many people, including, he says, "a couple of big handicappers" on the East Coast. "They pretty much laughed at me," Barr says. But after the third loss that he correctly predicted, one of the handicappers threatened to report him to the authorities.

Barr didn't worry about getting into trouble for claiming to have fixed games. "My brother kept telling me, 'Don't be saying that stuff to people,'" he says. "I said, 'Nobody will take me seriously, come on.'"

JILTED GLOVER

Barr (far left) and Locke grew up together, but Locke, Barr says, stiffed him when he got to the bigs.

Pirates," Don Barr says. "I said, 'No—we were childhood friends.' He never wrote me back."

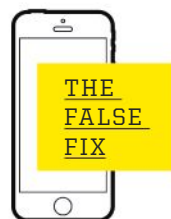
Locke's rude message to his brother angered Kris Barr. It bothered him too, that Locke "never wrote back to me," he says. He took it as an obvious put-down. The more he thought about it, the more it irked him.

From then on Barr carried a grudge against his former friend. "I said, if he ever makes it to the big leagues, I'm betting against him every time."

IN SEPTEMBER 2011, Locke was called up to the Pirates. "I was hoping he would do horrible," Barr says, "and he did."

After Locke was knocked around in three games, Barr decided to handicap the pitcher's Sept. 28 start against Milwaukee. He picked the Brewers to score at least five runs, to have the lead after five innings and to win by two runs or more. Barr got everything right: Locke gave up three home runs and the Brewers won 7-3. But there was little interest in a late-season game between two also-ran clubs.

Locke spent most of the 2012 season in Triple A, but in



GAME-FIXING WAS at the heart of baseball's worst scandal, and it almost killed the sport. In 1919 eight players from the White Sox were accused of conspiring with gamblers to throw the World Series. Baseball vowed to drive gambling from the game and banned the players for life. Since then, publicized gambling scandals in baseball have been rare. The worst involved alltime hit king Pete Rose, who was banned in 1989 for betting on baseball while managing the Reds. But Rose was accused only of betting on games, not fixing them.

Perhaps there aren't more serious attempts to fix games because it's such a dangerous and complicated undertaking, says Fay Vincent, commissioner of baseball from 1989 to '92. Besides, players know they face a lifetime ban if they are caught. In an era of multimillion-dollar salaries, the risk of that draconian punishment hardly seems worth the payoff from gamblers. Still, even though fixing a game is an improbable scenario, "baseball is very concerned about corruption," Vincent says. If the sport heard allegations of game-fixing that were at all credible, it surely would react aggressively.

It didn't seem that way to Congero, who couldn't get anyone to listen.

She was rebuffed by a contact at the Nevada Gaming Commission, then by a friend in federal law enforcement. Finally, a friend who works in the sports book at a casino suggested contacting MLB. Congero found a number and made the call, telling her story to a baseball security official.

Three months passed. Then, in January 2013, two MLB investigators visited Congero in Las Vegas. They wanted to see the text messages from the handicapper and paid her \$150 for her phone. She says she never heard from them again—which baffled her considering the accuracy of Barr's prediction. "The bottom line," Congero says, "is what he said would happen, happened."

Actually, by the time they met with Congero, baseball investigators already had fielded several reports about a gambler named Hunter who claimed to be fixing games with Jeff Locke—and they were taking the allegations seriously. An early tip came in an anonymous letter routed to MLB's department of investigations. The unit was set up in 2008 in response to criticism that the sport had been lax in policing steroid abuse. Under Daniel Mullin, a former deputy chief of the NYPD who headed the department from its inception until this year, the unit had become known for aggressive investigations. Last year Yankees star Alex Rodriguez complained in a lawsuit that Mullin had subjected him to "scorched earth" tactics in MLB's probe of the player's alleged steroid use. In May, Mullin was fired in a shake-up of the investigative unit.

The possible fixed-game case was assigned to senior investigator Rick Burnham, a former New York City police detective. He says he considered the initial tip "elaborate [and] credible." Soon Burnham received another tip concerning Locke, from the NYPD's organized-crime division: A source in Las Vegas had told detectives of a gambler named Gordon Hunter who was "working in cahoots with a player fixing games," Burnham recalls.

After that, Burnham and the New York City police investigated the case together. For a time they focused on the pitcher. They reviewed hours of game video, looking for signs that Locke was deliberately giving up hits by taking velocity off his pitches or throwing them over the heart of the plate. The investigators spotted nothing conclusive, nor did they uncover any contacts between the pitcher and organized-crime figures or gamblers.

Identifying Hunter was easy: The VIP Sports Investment website and cellphone numbers led them to Kris Barr. Investigators noted that the site was registered in Locke's New Hampshire hometown—the first evidence that the gambler's claim of a personal connection with the pitcher might be true. They decided to go to Arizona.

ON THE FROSTY morning of Feb. 21, 2013, Kris Barr became convinced he was being followed by "undercover" cars—late-model vehicles with heavily tinted windows, driven by men who looked like plainclothes police. Wherever he drove in Prescott Valley one of the cars would turn up in his rearview mirror. His concern deepened when he drove to work and found another car parked outside the office. Agitated, he drove away. When he got to a bowling alley on Second Street, he abruptly pulled into the lot, abandoned his car and walked home.

By the time he got there, Barr had decided the police were after him. He called the county drug task force, which he had encountered during his conviction for a misdemeanor marijuana charge three years earlier. Barr says the officer assured him that nobody was following him. When Barr persisted, the officer told him to go to the hospital and "get psychiatric help."

By that evening Barr was frantic. He asked for help retrieving his car: While Barr waited in a borrowed car, several members of his family piled into two vehicles and drove to the bowling alley. His sister, Savannah, then got behind the wheel of Kris's car, with his girlfriend, Kendra Hagerty, and their seven-month-old baby as passengers. Barr's mother followed in her car. His brother Don and a 12-year-old niece trailed in his own car.

They drove a mile on a strip of two-lane asphalt through a semirural area west of town. Then, according to Barr's family, all hell broke loose. As many as eight unmarked cars with lights flashing roared down the darkened road, forcing the convoy to pull over. Plainclothes officers jumped out.

According to Savannah Barr, an officer with a drawn gun leaned into the car and declared, "Whoever is driving this car is going to jail!" Frightened and in tears, she got out of the car.



KEITH SPRADOC (CAP GAME)

The officer was looking for Kris Barr: Kris had been in “a hit-and-run in New Mexico,” he said, and the other driver was in critical condition. Where was Kris?

Don Barr had turned on his cellphone to record the traffic stop. He too was told to get out of his car. He says he could hear officers yelling at his sister, threatening to put her in jail and take her kids away if she didn’t disclose Kris Barr’s whereabouts.

Don called out to her, saying she didn’t have to say anything. For that, he says, he was handcuffed.

“You’re causing a ruckus,” an officer says in the recording.



identify the Arizona agency involved in the traffic stop.

The Yavapai County sheriff, the Prescott Valley police and the U.S. Marshals Service said they weren’t involved. Finally, The Center for Investigative Reporting queried the office of Maricopa County sheriff Joe Arpaio, a flamboyant lawman famous for publicity stunts that burnish his tough-on-crime image. Arpaio’s office is in Phoenix, a county away from the Barr family incident. But by Arizona law a sheriff can enter another agency’s jurisdiction to investigate a crime.

Spokesman Lieut. Brandon Jones confirmed that the department’s fugitive unit had made the traffic stop to assist the New York detectives. He said there was no incident report—“no records, no nothing,” as he put it—and said the detective in charge of the traffic stop declined to be interviewed. “MLB asked them not to talk,” Jones said.

On the side of the road that night, Savannah Barr gave in. She called her brother and pleaded with him to come talk to the officers. *Kris*, she said, *they say you killed somebody with your car and I’m about to be put in jail for it.*

Filled with dread, Kris Barr drove to the desolate stretch of road where his family had been stopped. He approached the officers and told them he didn’t know anything about an accident. The officers, Barr says, acknowledged that they had been following him all day. Now they were waiting for a special agent coming from the airport.

Half an hour later the man Barr would come to call “MLB Rick”—Burnham—arrived in an SUV with two New York City detectives. Somebody told Barr to get in the car. As soon as the door closed, the investigators asked

BAD OUTING

In a parking lot interrogation, Barr told Burnham (near left) he got lucky when he said the Cubs would rock Locke (far left, with ball).

The Barr family estimates **15 officers surrounded them that night** on a dark Arizona road. To this day, they have no idea who the officers were.

Don Barr asks who the officers are. “You guys are supposed to tell me why I was pulled over,” he says.

“We’re conducting an investigation,” one officer responds. “. . . And I am not giving you any information about what we’re investigating. Do I look like a traffic cop to you?”

“I’m a very secretive person,” the officer continues. “When I feel like you have a need to know, I’ll tell you.”

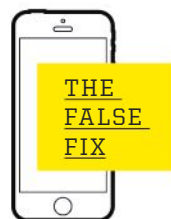
By the Barr family’s estimates, 15 officers surrounded them that night. To this day, they have no idea who the officers were.

The investigators who worked the fixed-game case were not forthcoming. MLB punted questions to the NYPD. Det. Cheryl Crispin, a department spokeswoman, acknowledged detectives had investigated the case. But she declined to

about Jeff Locke. “I started laughing,” Barr says. “But it wasn’t anything funny for the next hour.”

We have proof you fixed baseball games, Barr remembers the investigators telling him before adding that they were going to convict him on a “ton of charges” and send him to prison for years. When Barr denied fixing games, he says Burnham “went crazy on me . . . cussing at me, telling me I needed to cooperate—he called me a liar so many times in that car.” Burnham is a muscular, grim-faced man, a former U.S. Marine sergeant. His booming voice filled the SUV.

The investigators advised Barr that “the best thing for me was just to admit it,” he says. “They told me they would give me 10 minutes with Kendra and the baby to say goodbye before



they took me away.” Rattled and scared, Barr tried to explain his boyhood friendship with Locke, saying the story of fixing games was just “something stupid” that had begun with a slight on Facebook. He hadn’t talked to Locke since they were kids. Burnham, Barr says, yelled, “I know you’ve talked to Jeff Locke!”

The grilling went on until the investigators seemed to run out of questions. They sent Barr home, ordering him to wait for them the next morning in the parking lot of a Family Dollar store on state Route 69. If he didn’t show up, Barr says, they made it clear they would track him down and put him in jail.

The next morning Barr met the investigators and climbed back into the SUV. This session was less intense. Barr says he was told to write a statement explaining the hoax. The investigators also wanted a list of his boyhood friends from New Hampshire and all the contacts in his cellphone. As the interview wrapped up, Barr says, the investigators made it clear they still thought he was lying. “There’s no way you predicted the outcomes of those games,” he recalls Burnham saying.

Over the next six weeks Barr received many phone calls and four visits from the investigators, usually unannounced. Burnham combed through Barr’s Twitter account and cellphones. Barr’s girlfriend, sister and brother were interviewed. Don Barr



JEFF LOCKE FIRST learned of the investigation after it was over, early in the 2013 season. Baseball investigators asked to

meet with him, says Bob Lenaghan, a lawyer for the baseball players’ union. Lenaghan went along. “They told him, ‘You should know that this person out there, who you knew when you were a kid and played [youth] baseball, had made allegations against you.’” he says.

The investigators assured Locke that they had concluded the allegations were bogus. They told him that Barr had concocted the story out of jealousy, Lenaghan recalls, because “he always thought it should have been him—he was a better baseball player back then and life ain’t fair.”

How did Locke react? “Put yourself in his shoes,” Lenaghan says. “It is surprising. But he first heard about it at the same time he was cleared, so I don’t think it was as much a distraction as it otherwise might have been.”

Locke declined to discuss the investigation with reporters. He is “glad that it is behind him,” his agent, Seth Levinson, wrote in an email. When approached before a recent Pirates-Giants game in San Francisco, the pitcher rebuffed questions. “I don’t know anything about it—sorry, man,” he said, and retreated to the training room.

The game-fixing probe didn’t seem to affect Locke. Signed to a \$497,500 contract, he started strong in 2013. In the first half he went 8–2 with a 2.15 ERA and was named to that All-Star team. But in the second half of the season he faltered, going 2–5 with a 6.12 ERA. In August 2013, Locke was briefly sent to Triple A.

As Locke struggled, Barr couldn’t resist needling him. “On his Twitter, I wrote, ‘Have fun watching the postseason from home,’” Barr says. “I was just being a jerk.”

Soon after, his phone rang. It was Burnham with a clear and direct message: “Quit trying to talk to Jeff Locke.” □

THE STOPPER

Though it’s a county away, the office of the publicity-hungry Arpaio assisted MLB in pursuing Barr.

Arpaio’s spokesman said the detective in charge of the traffic stop would not comment. **“MLB asked them not to talk.”**

said the investigator went through his Facebook account, focusing on the messages he had sent to Locke.

Weeks passed without contact. Then, in April 2013, Burnham called Barr. To close the case, he said the gambler would have to take a lie-detector test.

By then, Barr was no longer afraid. He told Burnham to “f--- off,” he says, and hung up. Then he reconsidered and called back. He would take the polygraph exam as long as MLB agreed to pay him \$10,000 if the test showed he was telling the truth. Burnham agreed to think it over, Barr says. Later “he called me back and said no, and that was it.”

In the end, both the New York City Police Department and baseball officials had examined the case from every angle. The police department concluded that no crime had been committed, spokeswoman Crispin said, and “the case was referred to MLB for their internal investigation.”

I FINALLY EARNED ENOUGH

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THEN THEY RAISED THE MILES

REQUIRED TO FLY TO NYC.

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Take a deep look at almost any college football program, and you'll find them sitting there waiting to be uncovered, like pill bugs balled up under a rock: comeback stories. They are the lifeblood of sports, testaments to resilience and perseverance that never fail to stir a reaction. The tales highlighted in this issue are among the most compelling of the season. One involves a player, another a coach and a third an entire program, and as is often the case, these stories are the result of injuries (USC's George Farmer), poor decisions (Louisville's Bobby Petrino) or some combination of both (Florida). Reading about the humbling drive to find what has been lost gives hope to those whose favorite receiver or play-caller is working for one more chance to get it right, to crawl out of the shadows, stretch his legs and run to daylight.

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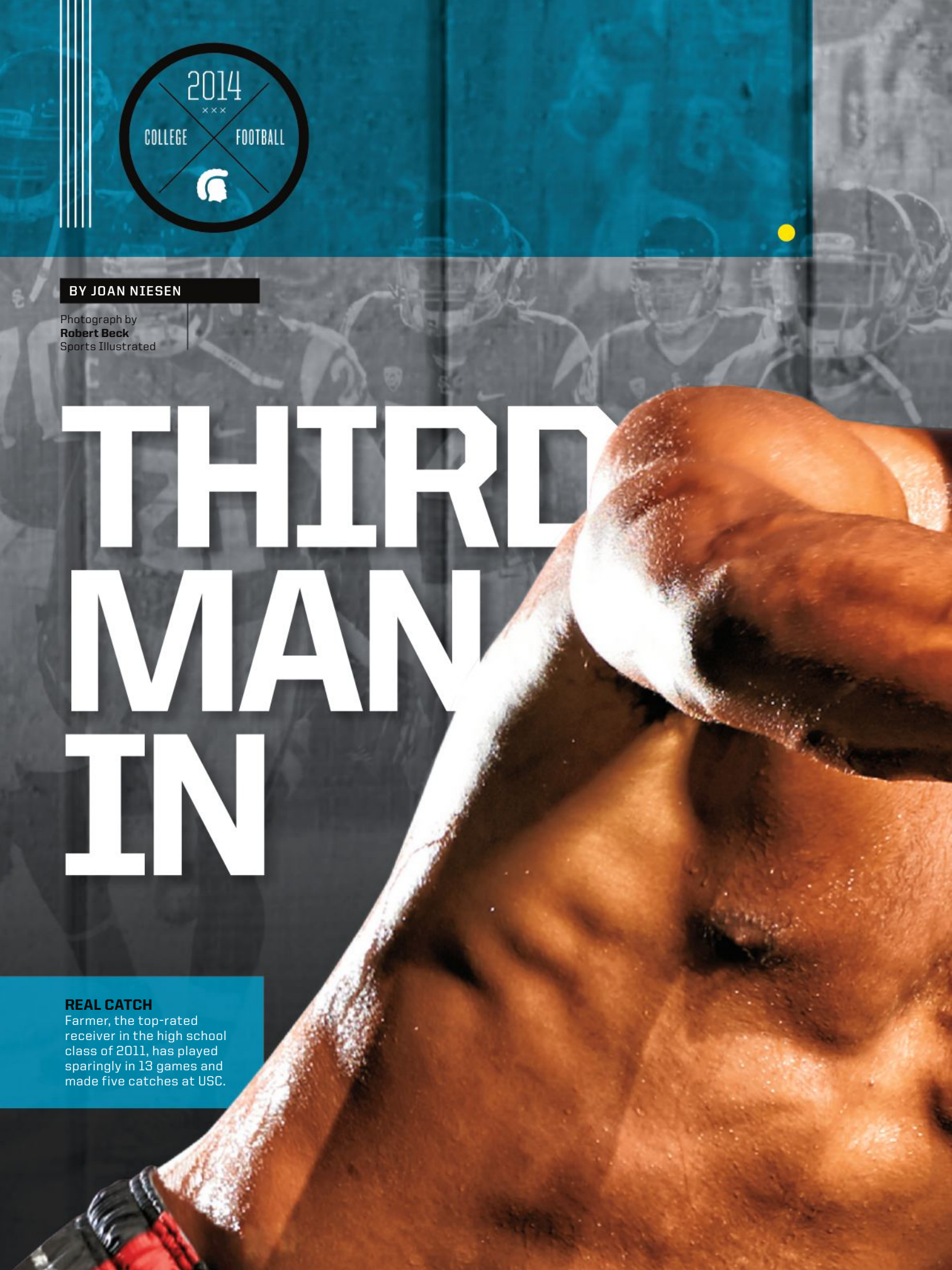
BY JOAN NIESEN

Photograph by
Robert Beck
Sports Illustrated

THIRD MAN IN

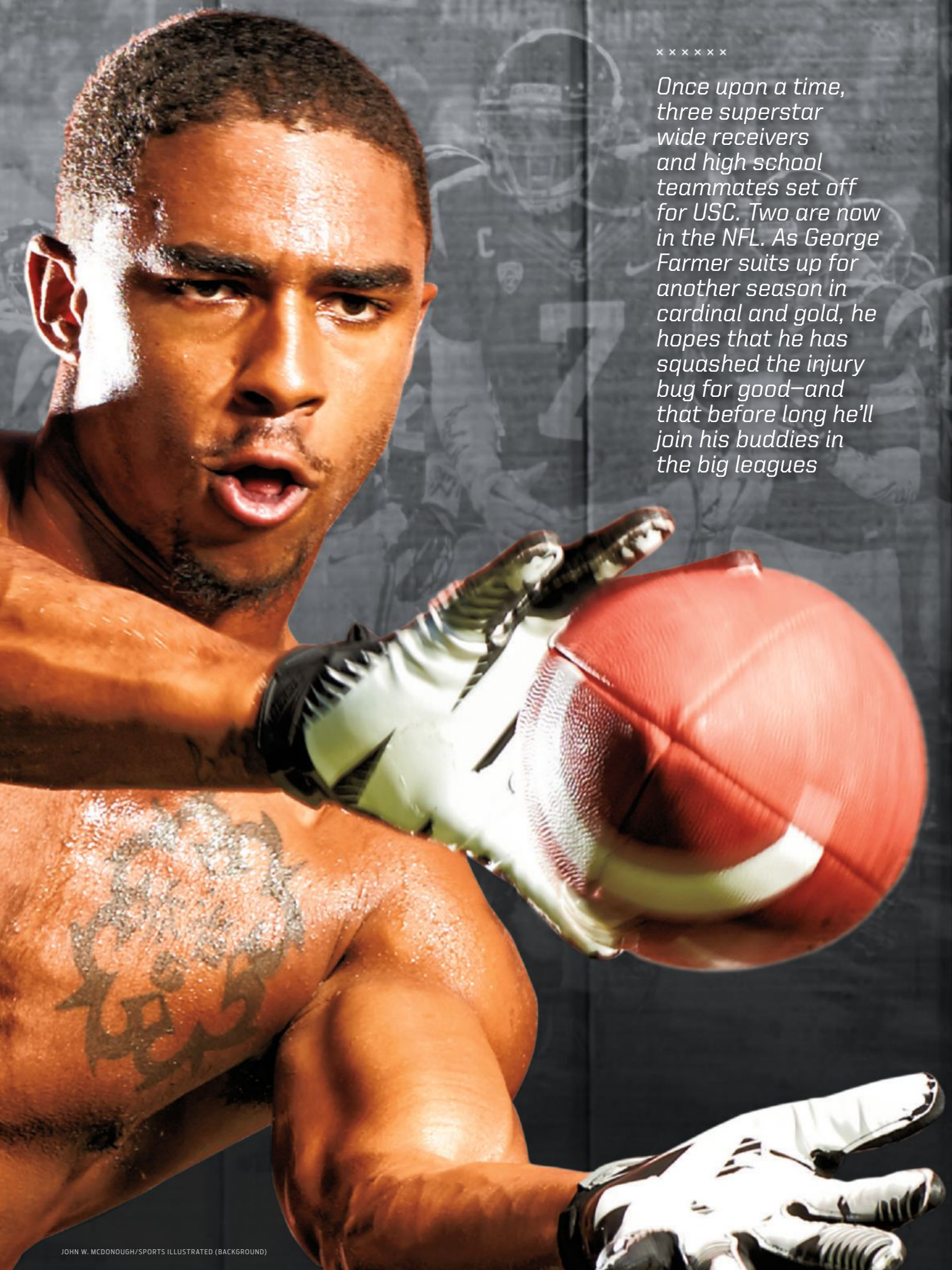
REAL CATCH

Farmer, the top-rated receiver in the high school class of 2011, has played sparingly in 13 games and made five catches at USC.



xxxxxx

Once upon a time, three superstar wide receivers and high school teammates set off for USC. Two are now in the NFL. As George Farmer suits up for another season in cardinal and gold, he hopes that he has squashed the injury bug for good—and that before long he'll join his buddies in the big leagues



→ **ONCE UPON A TIME**, in South L.A., this could have been a fairy tale.

It's the story of three boys, each good enough to make a football team a powerhouse. They were the talk of Los Angeles after their high school team went undefeated in 2009. The following fall one of them accepted a scholarship to play up the road at USC, and a year later the other two followed.

It's the story of how they hoped to play together and should have played together, three receivers on an unstoppable offense.

It's the story of how that never happened.

You've heard of these boys, men now, or two of them at least. You know Robert Woods, the Buffalo Bills' second-year slot receiver, and you know Marqise Lee, the sixth receiver taken in the 2014 NFL draft, 39th overall by Jacksonville. They made it, from Friday nights at Junipero Serra High in Gardena, Calif., to Saturdays at the Coliseum to Sundays on network television. They pushed each other and cheered each other, model teammates and the best of friends.

But one of the boys got left behind—except the other two refuse to forget him, refuse to believe he won't still follow. In George Farmer's fairy tale the prince has yet to slay the dragon.

To put it simply, Farmer was the best of the three. The 6' 1" receiver had every physical advantage, from blazing speed to his 220-pound frame. His gifts were varied, yet they worked in perfect sync. "The thing about George is he's an absolute physical freak," says Scott Altenberg, who coached Farmer, Woods and Lee at Serra. "He's big. He's strong. He's fast. He's also quick. Every day in practice we would do everything that we could competing against each other. It didn't matter what it was—a sprint, some kind of movement drill—nobody could beat him. Nobody could beat George."

That changed when Farmer got to USC and his body began to beat itself. First came a concussion, then a recurring hamstring injury, then a sprained ankle. By the end of his sophomore year he'd played in only 13 games and caught five passes. The knockout blow was a torn ACL in his left knee on April 2, 2013, just as Farmer was beginning to look like the player he was supposed to be—the best receiver in the high school class of 2011. Now, 16 months after that knee went pop, Farmer is back, a redshirt junior coming off strong spring and summer practices, down a knee brace and up a measure of confidence that reminds him of the player he once was.



RUNNING BACK

Farmer, who spent a full year rehabbing his torn ACL, didn't shed his brace and the lingering doubts in his mind until after spring practice.



THEY SAY you can hear it. Farmer recalls only silence—
× × × from his teammates, from coaches on the sideline, from the ligament that he felt give way. He'd been running downfield in spring practice, the same way he'd done thousands of times, when his left foot planted oddly and his knee buckled. He landed

on the ground, got up and seemed fine, except for that initial twinge and a dull numbness up the back of his leg. He was O.K., he assured everyone, but within the week an MRI proved otherwise. Farmer's ACL was torn, his hope of a breakout



1,514

Receiving yards Farmer amassed on 65 catches in his senior year of high school, to go with 14 touchdowns.

x x x x x

49

Receiving yards Farmer has amassed entering his fourth year at USC. He's also returned three kicks for 59 yards.

you can't sit back," Farmer says. "You have to do something about it." Something, in this case, began with hours of flexibility work, as Farmer pushed his range of motion and set the blood flowing in his stiff joint once again. The first time USC's head athletic trainer Russ Romano bent Farmer's knee after surgery, the receiver screamed. It was a motion he'd taken for granted, and here it was, making his leg feel like it had just gone up in white-hot flames.

Farmer massaged and bent, rubbed and straightened, until the fire subsided. In the weeks after the surgery the receiver took to measuring his legs. His right calf circumference measured 18 inches, his right quadriceps 24, but the left-side numbers made him cringe. His calf was just 11 inches around, his quad 16. Sweatpants hid the discrepancy, but in the training room, with what were left of his muscles flexed, it was hard to avoid.

Where's my leg? he asked himself daily. Soon the measurements started creeping up. Three



JORDAN HICKS LONE STAR REVIVAL

○ Texas linebacker Jordan Hicks arrived from Ohio in 2010 as the country's top-ranked high school linebacker, stiff-arming offers from Alabama, USC and Ohio State. But injuries have cost him 19 games over the past two years, and he enters his final season in Austin with urgency. "I've got one shot to live up to who I know I am," he says, "and prove myself to everyone else."

In the Longhorns' 2011 Holiday Bowl win over California, Hicks flashed promise with eight tackles, a sack and a pass breakup. Then the injuries hit. Hicks suffered a groin pull at Ole Miss that ended his '12 season in the third game. In '13 he ruptured his left Achilles against Kansas State in the fourth game and didn't return until summer. Hicks, who was UT's leading tackler before the Achilles tear, says playing on a rolled ankle may have contributed to the injury. "I wouldn't take the decision back," he says. "It's who I am."

Texas went 8-5 last year, but those five losses were by an average of 21.6 points, and the team finished 83rd in rush defense. Hicks, now in his fifth year in Austin, hopes to revive the Longhorns' defensive swagger and his own prospects. "It's do or die," Hicks says. "I think I do well under pressure."

—Pete Thamel

and a half months after surgery the former track star was able to jog straight ahead. He added slight cuts soon after, once he'd been fitted for his knee brace, and at seven months a semblance of a football routine returned. It was then that Farmer began running drills, and his muscles began to recall the memories he never thought they'd forget. At eight months Farmer began feeling "kind of normal" again, which was excellent timing: Spring ball for the 2014 season was right around the corner.

The doctors advised USC's coaches to ease Farmer back. His brace was ever present, a kind of security blanket that allowed his confidence to grow, and right around 10 months, at the start of spring ball, Farmer began to stop thinking about the injury. For some, that's the moment recovery ends. But for Farmer, that's when it began. He was no longer the injured football player, no longer reliant on a hunk of black plastic strapped to his knee. At the end of the spring Farmer bid adieu to his brace, completing preseason physical testing without it. There were a few weeks of soreness—"It wasn't a bad sore," Farmer explains—and then the muscles in that left knee stabilized. Farmer's mind did the same.

THERE IS A RIP on the left knee of Farmer's gym shorts, and on this mid-July morning, fresh off a workout, he pulls at it, his thumb spinning the tear around his index finger.
× × × He earned that hole somewhere, at practice, or in the weight room, or during one of these mornings of summer drills, and thank goodness for it. He's started earning things again: his coaches' trust, his teammates' awe, his own faith.

As Farmer speaks, an errant soccer ball trails toward him across the brick patio outside the John McKay Center at USC. His eyes follow the ball as it bounce-bounce-rolls, and when it lands at his feet, Farmer's instinct is to stand and kick it back, which he makes the first flash of a motion to do. But he stops, picks up the ball and tosses it. His knees remain still.

This is the mental exercise Farmer now practices, the transition from taking everything for granted to taking nothing for granted. It's the flexing required to pull your brain out of the past and into the precarious now. "It psychologically messes you up," Farmer says, "because you feel like you aren't ever going to get back to where you were before."

This is a man who wore a Superman logo on his track uniform in high school, and it seemed more



FAST COMPANY

Farmer (8) stood on the sideline with Agholor (15) and Lee (9) in 2012, and caught up with former high school rival De'Anthony Thomas later that season.

accurate than boastful. Woods and Lee can attest to the fact that this kid was a beast, the standard by which they measured their abilities. And now they're in the NFL, and Farmer toils at USC, hoping he still has what it takes to catch up.

When USC's new coaching staff arrived in Los Angeles last winter,

Farmer was back in physical shape, but mentally he was a long way off. "George is still the one, still at SC, but he's an NFL talent," says coach Steve Sarkisian, who has to convince the young receiver that his potential hasn't waned. Sarkisian, who unsuccessfully recruited Farmer at Washington, had an inkling of what that would take, and upon arriving at USC he made sure to show Farmer a tape he'd brought along. It was of Kevin Smith, a former Washington receiver who went undrafted last spring and is now under contract with the Seahawks. Smith sat out the 2012 season with an ACL tear, and yet on this film from '13 he looks like the kid out of Centennial High in Compton who Farmer had watched throughout his high school career.

And then there's Farmer's dad, who goes by the same name and played receiver for four seasons in the NFL in the 1980s, three with the L.A. Rams and one with the Dolphins. He blew out his knee



early in his pro career, and he came back, although briefly. That reassurance helps, as does the story of Kenechi Udeze, a defensive end who dated Farmer's sister Veronica when Farmer was in elementary school. Udeze starred at USC, and he would bring his girlfriend's kid brother around to play catch with the likes of Reggie Bush and Matt Leinart. That's where Farmer's USC dream began, and as he watched Udeze get picked by the Vikings in the first round of the NFL draft,

When it comes time for pep talks, the PHONE CALLS ARE TO WOODS AND LEE, who tell him about life in the NFL and how he's going to get there.

his dreams became anticipation. Four years later, though, Udeze was diagnosed with leukemia and retired, making a torn ACL look like only the tiniest of setbacks.

These are the men Farmer remembers when he feels left behind, but when it comes time for pep talks, the phone calls are to Woods and Lee. They tell him about life in the NFL, about what it's like to prepare for a pro day or the combine. They tell him he's going to get there because neither can fathom a world in which he doesn't.

"Now it's George time," Woods says. "He has had to sit back and watch myself and Marqise go through it, and now me and Marqise are still in contact with him, telling him it's his time now."

Farmer has always listened. Recently, though, he's begun to believe.

WHEN TEE MARTIN took over as USC's receivers coach in 2012, a banged-up Farmer was listed as a running back on the Trojans' roster. He'd moved there after nagging injuries slowed him freshman year and cost him a starting job—one Lee ended up winning—but the fit wasn't right. Soon after Martin arrived, he heard that Farmer wanted to move back to his natural position. Martin was elated.

Two years later he feels that way again. "I'm excited," Martin says over and over as he discusses every aspect of the season to come, as he dares to entertain the prospect of Farmer being healthy and lining up next to star junior Nelson Agholor.



CHUCKIE KEETON BRACING HIMSELF

○ Six months after the season-ending ACL and MCL tears he suffered in an Oct. 4 game against BYU, Chuckie Keaton eased into limited spring practices. But Utah State's thrill-inducing dual-threat quarterback was bothered by the plastic and fabric that encased his left knee. He fiddled with it after every play. Eventually, though, Keaton ceased to notice. After two weeks of spring ball, a summer of strength and conditioning, and player-run practices, he forgot about the brace. "Now," he says, "it's like an extension of my body."

That's a good thing for Utah State, which plans to have Keaton under center for its Aug. 31 opener at Tennessee. In 2012, Keaton set single-season school records for touchdown passes (27), passing yards (3,373) and total offense (3,992). He came into '13 with his fair share of Heisman buzz, which he justified by throwing for 18 touchdowns and 1,388 yards (with only two interceptions) in six games.

This fall the noise isn't quite as loud, but it's there—and Keaton has tried to embrace it. "Years ago there was never even a thought that Utah State would have a Heisman candidate," he says, "and I think I bring it in the back of my head to every practice so I have something to live up to every day." —J.N.

“He knows what he wants to be, knows how he wants to feel, and man, he went after it,” Martin says. “Mentally, he’s prepared for what’s at stake this season.”

The adjectives are flying: Elite. Special. One-of-a-kind. Although Martin concedes he won’t likely coach a group as talented as Woods, Lee and Farmer ever again, he and Sarkisian envision Farmer zipping up the perimeter, manhandling opponents in one-on-one coverage, leaping into the end zone. Farmer fits perfectly into the offense Sarkisian and company are installing, a sped-up version of USC’s traditional pro-style attack. Apart from Agholor, the Trojans’ depth chart at receiver has plenty of open space, and Farmer, if healthy, should have no problem earning the reps he’s been dreaming of for the past three falls.

“You’re built up so much coming out of high school, and you kind of feel that pressure of, I have to be as good as I was coming out of high school,” Martin says. “He understands what it’s about, and he understands, his role and his piece of the puzzle.” Martin pauses. His mind is on a practice field somewhere, in an alternate universe where April 2, 2013, was just another practice. “If he’s healthy, man. . . .”

THE FAIRY TALE began at Serra High, 15 minutes down the 110 from USC. It’s a small school, just 650 kids, run by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. A statue of the missionary after which the place is named stands out front, and on a summer afternoon you’ll find a tall, muscular boy or two lingering out front, waiting for a ride home from a workout or a meeting.

× × ×

These boys know George Farmer. They know Lee and Woods, too, but Farmer is the one who still comes to their games, who just days after learning an injury would cause him to miss his first college game showed up in the stands at theirs. That night Farmer asked Altenberg if he could talk to the team after it suffered its first regular-season loss since 2007. Here was the star, the golden boy gone off to USC, and he was telling them about teamwork, about how he and Woods never competed for catches, about how Lee was never upset about being relegated to defense until Woods graduated.

HOME SCHOOL

Despite his own struggles, Farmer has been an inspirational presence for the players who followed him at Serra High.

“He’s down in the dumps, but he still comes,” Altenberg recalls. “He’s one of my proudest examples of what we’ve had because he’s persevered. The Woody and the Marquise, those guys are the easy and the obvious because they’ve been so successful. In a lot of ways I’m the most proud of George because he’s never put his head down. He just keeps grinding. I know it’s coming.”

It’s a healthy season. It’s a productive season. It’s a season when Farmer looks like the 21-year-old version of himself he was projected to be. Farmer’s focus is there, on the next six months, on establishing himself as a college player before he allows his mind to wander further. Sometimes, though,



JOHN PYLE/CAL SPORT MEDIA



x x x x x

Farmer fits perfectly into the offense Sarkisian and company are installing, a sped-up version of USC's traditional pro-style attack.

he can't help it. Sometimes he remembers the old pacts, the old dreams, when he and Woods and Lee would plot how they were going to end up on the same NFL team.

Farmer shrugs. Maybe it's still possible. Woods, though, admits that it's not. He's seen how hard football has been on his friend. He's seen that it's a business as much as a sport. No, Woods says, they won't all three wear the same uniform again. The goal is different now.

They're going to play in the same Pro Bowl. They're going to cling to their happy ending because once upon a time, it didn't seem half so hard to reach. □

CARY EDMONDSON/USA TODAY SPORTS (HILL)



AUSTIN HILL VIDEO REWIND

○ Austin Hill studied film and dissected his mechanics to ease the pain of a 2013 season lost to a torn left ACL. In the process the Arizona receiver learned he could be a pain in the rear. "I discovered what the coaches have to go through," Hill says with a laugh. "I didn't really understand why they would tell me to run routes certain ways. It opened my eyes to the true reasons I'm doing what I'm doing."

Teammates dubbed him Coach Hill for his unsolicited tips last fall, but now he must heed his own counsel and produce. Arizona has two of its top three receivers back and added transfer wideouts from Texas and Notre Dame. That depth means Hill might not match the 2012 output (81 catches, 1,364 yards, 11 touchdowns) that made him a Biletnikoff Award semifinalist. But the 6' 3" 210-pounder is confident in his ability to contribute after he saw on video how he could plant stronger on his cuts and break off routes closer to defenders.

Hill says he "tended to overthink" assignments before and believes his broader understanding of the position has him playing faster. "Wherever they want to put me, I can play," Hill says. "I know I'll get my chance to shine."

—Brian Hamilton



BY ANDY STAPLES

Photograph by
Jason Parkhurst
For Sports Illustrated

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A miserable season in which Florida, one of the top teams of the last 25 years, lost its high-scoring identity has given rise to a change of tactics, a new offensive coordinator and a group of coaches, players and fans who expect the Swamp to once again swallow up SEC opponents—and fast



LIFE AFTER 4-8



LATER GATORS

Florida has been putting in the hours to install a hurry-up attack after its worst season since 1979.



WILL MUSCHAMP sees the sign and swerves. He is about to swing his Mercedes sedan into a parking spot in front of a private air terminal in Gainesville, Fla., but the placard makes clear that the spot is reserved for someone who isn't Muschamp. "I'm not the Employee of the Month," Florida's football coach says. "That's for damn sure after 4-8."

After he finds a space, Muschamp walks through the terminal and boards the six-seater that saves him time but occasionally leaves him close to puking. Small planes have always tested Muschamp's stomach, though not as much as the 2013 season. On this sticky May afternoon, six days after his father, Larry, died at 79, Muschamp spends a bumpy 25 minutes en route to Lakeland, where 500 have gathered in a barn of a meeting hall to hear how Muschamp intends to pull the Gators out of their tailspin. Muschamp takes the stage to a standing ovation. He explains how much he loves Polk County. "It's one of my favorite stops. I can't say it's my favorite. That usually makes somebody mad," Muschamp says. "Folks, after going 4-8, I don't need to piss anybody else off."

If Muschamp, 43, seems to be quick to point out last year's record, he prefers that to having anyone think he is hiding from it. Sure he could explain how he lost starting quarterback Jeff Driskel (broken right fibula), backup quarterback Tyler Murphy (sprained right shoulder), mercurial but unstoppable defensive tackle Dominique Easley (torn right ACL), top running back Matt Jones (torn left knee cartilage), starting left tackle D.J. Humphries (sprained left MCL) and right-tackle-turned-left-tackle Tyler Moore (compound right-elbow fracture), but none of that matters. Florida isn't supposed to go 4-8. It isn't supposed to lose to Georgia Southern. At home.

If a player came into the coach's office with a case of the *poor me's*, Muschamp would jab a thumb toward the 17-inch steel rod that once held his lower right leg together. Muschamp broke the tibia and fibula playing high school baseball, and the injury transformed him from an SEC-caliber recruit at safety into an SEC-caliber walk-on. Before Muschamp began playing at Georgia, his doctor removed the rod, and Muschamp's mother, Sally, placed it in a shadow box and presented it to her son. Muschamp has displayed the rod in his office throughout his coaching career. It's a reminder that what happens to a man doesn't matter; what matters is how that man responds to what happens. Terrible misfortune befell the Gators in 2013. They responded with 4-8. Muschamp can't sulk about the circumstances. He wouldn't accept that from his players, so he can't accept it from himself.

Instead Muschamp laughs when a fan in Lakeland

DOWN IN THE MOUTH

Injuries to Driskel (6), Easley (2) and Moore (73), among others, put Muschamp (opposite) on his heels.

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110

Florida's offensive ranking out of 125 FBS teams in 2013, based on a season average of 4.79 yards per play.



tells him that the clip of two Florida players blocking each other against Georgia Southern has finally stopped running on ESPN's "Not Top 10." "That," Muschamp tells the fan, "was the gift that kept on giving." He remains quiet when another fan offers coaching advice: "You've got to throw the ball down the field this year. The crowd does not like it when we don't." If Muschamp were as unstable as his on-field demeanor suggests, his face would twist into that soul-eating stare that the television cameras always seem to catch, and nose to nose he would say, "Well, it's tough to throw the ball down the field when your third-string quarterback is playing behind third-string linemen and your best back is out, allowing the defense to drop seven or eight on every play—unless we wanted to call guaranteed interceptions." Except Muschamp



would lace his tirade with an unprintable adjective, which he also uses as a participle and occasionally as a gerund. He doesn't do this. He simply smiles through gritted teeth. Yes, he'd rather be in his backyard, with salmon in his smoker and assistants calling from the recruiting trail, than dealing with a second-guesser who probably thinks quarters coverage has something to do with a pay phone. He can't. He went 4-8.

T O TRY to change Florida's fortunes, Muschamp had to first admit a mistake. When he arrived in December 2010 after three seasons as the defensive coordinator at Texas, he pledged to run a pro-style offense similar to the ones Alabama and LSU used to dominate the SEC. Muschamp's first coordinator hire was Charlie Weis, who left to become the coach at Kansas after one



lackluster season. In 2012, Muschamp tapped then Boise State coordinator Brent Pease, whose offense finished 92nd in the nation in yards per play (5.25), just enough to complement a suffocating defense that lifted Florida to an 11–2 record. But Pease couldn't cobble together an effective game plan with his banged-up personnel in '13, and the offense finished 110th, with 4.79 yards per play. That number fell to 3.53 during a seven-game losing streak to close the season. During the final weeks the Gators looked as if they were running into a brick wall repeatedly while hoping for a different result each time. Muschamp doesn't blame Pease for this failure, but he fired Pease and offensive line coach Tim Davis anyway. Then he swallowed his pride.

When Muschamp was with Texas, he mocked



a game, 5.87 yards a play and won the ACC Coastal Division. That isn't Oregon or Baylor fast, but it was faster and far more effective than the Gators' offense. "Kurt is really, really smart," Cutcliffe says. "One of the things he'll bring to Florida is a better way to communicate offense."

That streamlined communication system turns a play with a name such as Flip Right Duo Florida 468 Bench into a play called Ace Bench by teaching skill players various assumptions that allow them to line up correctly without excess verbiage. At the same time, Roper has a few one-word plays that can be run as quickly as six seconds after the previous play ends. Driskel, now healthy, will take most of his snaps in the shotgun. He and the rest of the offense will hurry to the line and receive a signal from the sideline. On most downs Roper will give Driskel the option to throw, hand off or keep the ball with no change in the protection scheme. "If you ask defensive coaches, they can't tell whether it's run or pass," Cutcliffe says. "They have no idea." Driskel, who was originally recruited out of Hagerty (Oviedo, Fla.) High to run Urban Meyer's spread-option, will find himself doing something similar, mimicking Tim Tebow more than Danny Wuerffel.

Muschamp says he chose to drop the pro-style scheme after an examination of Florida's explosive plays from 2012—there weren't enough in '13 to even bother counting—showed that most occurred out of the shotgun. It's quite a departure for the coach who boasted after winning at Florida State in '12 that teams "better learn to [stop] the power and the counter when you play Florida." Has Muschamp gone soft to save his job? Roper contends teams still must stop the power to stop Florida. It will merely look different. Under Pease the Gators called power God's Play, because when run perfectly, it could feel like divine wrath to a defense. In it, a fullback or H-back kicks out the defender at the end of the line on the play side, while the backside guard and/or tackle pulls to lead the way for the back. This allows the other linemen to crash down on unsuspecting defenders, beating them with geometry before the ball is snapped. Pease would run God's Play with as many as seven offensive linemen on the field. Roper won't do that, but he'll still run plenty of power. As he was speeding up the offense at Duke, Roper always marveled at Oregon. He wondered: How are they running for 300 yards a game? He realized that because the Ducks used the entire width of the field, the defense couldn't pack the box. "Do you know where the biggest benefit is in the spread game? It's in your run game," Roper says. "Why? Because people have to defend everything on the edge."

the hurry-up style that dominated the Big 12. He called such schemes "look-back offenses" because the players at the line of scrimmage routinely turned to the sideline to get play calls and adjustments from their coaches. After last season's failure Muschamp decided to ride the hurry-up wave by hiring Duke offensive coordinator Kurt Roper. Roper has a pro-style background, having worked repeatedly with Manning whisperer David Cutcliffe at Tennessee (twice), Ole Miss and Duke, but he had experimented with the no-huddle while working for offensive coordinator Joker Phillips at Kentucky in 2005. In '07, Cutcliffe and Roper decided to shift into hurry-up mode, with Cutcliffe pressing Roper to cut the time between plays each year. "I thought we were going faster," Roper says. "Then he'd chew my ass." Last year the Blue Devils averaged 72.6 plays

That's especially true if the defense has to account for the possibility that a speedy 6' 4", 230-pound quarterback might keep the ball. "This is what he was recruited to Florida to do," Muschamp says of Driskel.

WHEN MEYER resigned from Florida for the second time, in December 2010, Driskel still had a chance to change his mind and go elsewhere. In the class of '11, Rivals.com ranked Driskel ahead of Ohio State's Braxton Miller, UCLA's Brett Hundley, Louisville's Teddy Bridgewater, Oregon's Marcus Mariota and a three-star recruit from Kerrville, Texas, named Johnny Manziel. Driskel was the can't-miss prospect of the group. He had a huge arm and was almost as big as Tebow, but with better wheels. Even after Muschamp declared his intention to keep his quarterback under center, Driskel didn't waver. "I committed to a school, to a program," Driskel says. "One player, one coach, one season is not going to define the program. That was my thought process."

Driskel won the starting job in 2012, beating out Jacoby Brissett and leading the Gators to victories over four teams (Texas A&M, LSU, South Carolina, Florida State) in the top 14 of the final Associated Press poll. Yet they often won in spite of their offense. That '12 defense, which has produced three NFL first-rounders—so far—suffocated opponents. It allowed 4.35 yards a play (fourth in the nation) and 14.5 points a game (fifth). Driskel had avoided costly mistakes, but he was a minor part of Florida's success.

The Gators saw no reason to tinker with the formula in 2013. In fact, the offense grew even more conservative after Brissett transferred to N.C. State. With Tyler Murphy and Skyler Mornhinweg—unheralded recruits—as backups, the coaches didn't want to risk calling runs for Driskel. It was a smart idea, but it wasn't enough to spare the quarterback. During a Sept. 21 game against Tennessee, Driskel broke his leg getting tackled while throwing. For six weeks he puttered around campus on a scooter. He didn't walk for two months. He couldn't travel with his teammates for road games, so he sat on his couch helplessly and watched the Gators' season circle the drain.

The darkness lifted slightly on New Year's Eve. Driskel spent the night with some friends in Tampa but kept an eye on the nearest television. Roper had been hired less than a week earlier, and he was coaching his final game at Duke against Texas A&M in the Chick-fil-a Bowl. Driskel watched the Blue Devils' receivers repeatedly get open, a sight that hadn't been seen much lately



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72.6

Number of
offensive plays
a game Duke
averaged
under Roper
last year,
when the
Blue Devils
won the
ACC Coastal
Division.



in Gainesville. He saw Duke's quarterbacks with options on most plays; that certainly hadn't been the case for him. The Devils lost, but only because of a vintage Johnny Football performance in his final college game. Roper's attack had rolled up 661 yards and 48 points.

The new offense, Driskel thought to himself, might work. Three days into spring practice Driskel was even more convinced. It felt natural, and the pace of play meant that he couldn't dwell on mistakes, a bad habit that had plagued him before. Maybe Roper's scheme would allow Driskel to prove he was as good as his advance hype suggested. "Coming in, I was highly recruited and pumped up by sportswriters, by fans," Driskel says. "I just think it's time to show people that I'm a football player and that what I've shown in the past isn't always me."

Driskel's teammates, meanwhile, want to prove 2012 was accurate and '13 was the anomaly. While Muschamp must address 4–8 until the Gators kick off their season against Idaho on Aug. 30, Florida players have buried it—and not in a figurative sense. During a 90-minute May meeting to discuss the summer training session, strength coach Jeff Dillman tossed Muschamp and the position coaches from the room and told players to list all their reasons for the failures of '13. Dillman had an assistant jot down every reason the players offered on a sheet of paper. "They threw it all out there," Dillman says. "I said, 'O.K. Are we done with that? Anybody else got anything to say?' " Dillman wrote 4–8 across the top of the page and folded it up. After the meeting wrapped, he led the players out of Ben Hill Griffin Stadium, across Gale Lemerand Drive and onto the practice field. The team formed a circle. Dillman showed the



he dismissed successful-but-slipping baseball, tennis, gymnastics and track coaches in rapid succession because “if something needs to be done eventually, it needs to be done immediately.” Foley fired Ron Zook in 2004, seven games into his third season as Florida’s football coach. That move paved the way for the hiring of Meyer and two national titles. So why, given that history, is Muschamp still at Florida?

Because to Foley, 2013 didn’t feel like ’04. When Foley hired Muschamp in December ’10, he envisioned an annual contender by December 2015. Foley still believes Muschamp can get the Gators there. He didn’t feel that way about Zook. “Will gives me that confidence. I’ve been around him,” Foley said. “He won 11 games the year before. I don’t think that was an accident. I don’t think he just rolled the balls out.” Foley appreciated that



Gators their list one last time. “I took a shovel, I dug a hole and I buried it,” Dillman says. After he filled the hole, Dillman made every player step on the spot where 4–8 was interred.

DRISKEL WORKED a pair of jobs this summer, and he found himself answering the same questions at each. Whether he was slicing brisket at 4 Rivers Smokehouse or operating as a utilityman at the Ironwood Golf Course, the customers always wanted to know two things.

- 1) How is the offense going to look?
- 2) Is Muschamp going to get fired?

“Obviously, we’re behind our coach 100%, but we’re not playing to save his job,” Driskel says. “We’re playing for the University of Florida. We’re playing for each other.” Besides, the only man in Gainesville who can decide whether Muschamp stays or goes is Florida athletic director Jeremy Foley. It was Foley who, in 2002, explained to the AP that

In the class of ’11, RIVALS RANKED DRISKEL AHEAD OF Braxton Miller, Brett Hundley, Marcus Mariota and even Johnny Manziel.

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BLUE BLOOD
Roper will teach Driskel (bottom) all he learned at Duke in hopes of reviving an offense that yielded two BCS titles for Gator Nation.

Muschamp never developed a case of the *poor me*’s. “Not one time did he make an excuse,” Foley said. “Not one time. He just went to work.”

Of course, Foley knows his judgement isn’t infallible. Another season close to 2013 would alter that gut feeling. Unlike the callers to sports talk radio shows across the Sunshine State, Foley doesn’t have a magic number that will determine whether Muschamp keeps his job. “I’ve never, ever, ever, *ev-er* in my 23 years as athletic director told a coach he had to win X number of games, or you have to beat this team or you have to go to this bowl,” Foley says. “We need to be better. We need to be in the hunt. We’ll be able to tell at the end of the fall. Are the Florida Gators better? Are the Florida Gators headed in the right direction?”

Foley will watch and evaluate, and at some point he’ll know if he made the correct choice in 2010 or whether he’ll have to start over. Muschamp, meanwhile, has bet that Roper and Driskel can produce an offense that deserves to play alongside Florida’s defense. “At the end of the day college coaches are always on the hot seat,” Driskel says of Muschamp. “They’re always getting evaluated. That’s nothing new. But I think after this year, those questions will be gone.”

Indeed. Those questions will disappear. One way or the other. □





BY TIM LAYDEN *with special reporting by Thayer Evans*

Photograph by
Jeff Reinking
Louisville Athletics

LATHER, RINSE, REPEAT



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Having left several jobs abruptly and been driven from another by scandal, Bobby Petrino is back at Louisville. He says he's a changed man, and he talks about the past with reluctance. As for Cardinals fans, they just want to watch Petrino's offense rack up points



ON THE FIRST evening in July, a boisterous crowd gathered in downtown Louisville, ostensibly to celebrate the University of Louisville's official entry into the Atlantic Coast Conference.

It was a noteworthy moment because power-conference affiliation in college sports is the clearest path to financial survival. But let's not kid ourselves: The hundreds of Cardinals fans who chose to spend a sweltering early-summer night crammed into a pedestrian block were there because it had been 95 days since the basketball team was eliminated from the NCAA tournament by Kentucky and it would be 62 more days before the football team kicked off its 2014 season at home against Miami. Those fans needed a fix.

At a few minutes past seven, a shrilly enthusiastic emcee introduced football coach Bobby Petrino, who walked to the center of the stage dressed in Cardinals-themed golf wear. The audience screamed in recognition and then chanted



CROWD PLEASER

At the July rally for Louisville fans, Petrino targeted the Cardinals' toughest opponents and announced the return of the Blackout.

Petrino's name—*Bob-bee! Bob-bee! Bob-bee!*—for a full 18 seconds before he requested silence with a subtle wave of his hand, as a king might calm his subjects, and with the awkward half smile that is his default facial expression.

This was the same Bobby Petrino who coached the Cards to 41 victories from 2003 through '06—including a 12–1 record, an Orange Bowl win and a No. 6 AP national ranking in his last season—and then left to become coach of the Falcons less than six months after signing a 10-year contract to remain at Louisville. It was the same Petrino who left the Falcons with three games remaining in his only season in Atlanta, to take over at Arkansas. It was, notoriously, the same Petrino whose four-year tenure with the Razorbacks, who won 21 games in his last two seasons, ended when he crashed a motorcycle while riding with his 25-year-old mistress, whom he had hired to work in his office. *That Bob-bee.*

Petrino, who was rehired by Louisville last January after Charlie Strong left for Texas, took the microphone and thanked the fans for coming. Then he launched into full pep-rally mode. He listed challenging games at Virginia, Clemson and Notre Dame and then paused dramatically before punching this line about Florida State: “And on a Thursday night at home, the defending national champions! Y’all be there for that one, right? I might never sleep again.”

Petrino was then joined onstage by two players in full black uniforms, and the coach brought the show to a rollicking finish with the news that “on September 1, 8 p.m., Papa John’s Cardinal Stadium, we’re bringing back the Blackout!” It was a reference to the Miami game and to a tradition—players in black uniforms and fans in black shirts—that Petrino had begun for a game against West Virginia in 2006 and had since been abandoned.

As he walked off the stage and into the twilight, the crowd roared its approval. *Bob-bee! Bob-bee! . . .*

FOUR HOURS EARLIER, Petrino sits in his office for an interview, his chair positioned at a 90-degree angle to a reporter’s. His workspace is in the north end zone of the stadium, with a panoramic view of the field. The interview has not been easy to arrange. It was requested weeks earlier, through Louisville’s media relations department. A negotiation ensued. Petrino and the p.r. staff wondered if the interview would include questions about his past and, if so, when that past might no longer be part of the narrative—because, frankly, his family was tired of reading about it. And Petrino had done plenty of talking about it when he was hired.



READY FOR ANYTHING

Petrino's tough practices and thorough preparation are the keys to his success in developing players.

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63

Number of suites at Papa John's Stadium, all of which have been sold, at \$50,000 apiece, since Petrino returned.



Answer: Petrino's “past” will always be part of the narrative. A couple of national championships might push the word *motorcycle* from the second paragraph of his obituary to the third or fourth, but *motorcycle* will be written. Petrino and his staff also wanted to know if the story would be “positive,” something that could not be guaranteed.

In his previous coaching incarnations—at Louisville, Atlanta and Arkansas—Petrino was painfully awkward with the media. He arrived at press conferences looking as if he had just gnawed on a lemon. A few days before that Blackout game in 2006, in the atrium of the Louisville football headquarters, he was answering some softball questions designed to set up a possible SI story about the Cardinals’ great season if they were to defeat the Mountaineers. (They did, 44–34.) In the middle of one question he turned and walked away, as if he had forgotten something so important that he felt no need to excuse himself. It wasn't so much disrespectful as asocial and strange. “When Bobby was here before,” says university president James T. Ramsey, “he was an introvert who cared about football and family. Of course, since then, he’s learned a hard lesson about family.”

Now here he sits, charged with driving home the message that Louisville has propagated since he was rehired after a year in repose and a year as the coach at Western Kentucky: Bobby is a changed man. Ramsey reiterated that this very morning. “We all screw up,” he said. “A lot of powerful people forget what’s important. Bobby went through a hard process and then committed himself to changing.”

Athletic director Tom Jurich, who in 17 years has grown Louisville’s athletic budget from about \$15 million to more than \$70 million, is the man

GARRY JONES/AP



who brought Petrino back, with the rubber-stamp approval of Ramsey and the university's athletic association. "Tom has complete autonomy," says Jonathan Blue, who runs a private equity firm in Louisville and sits on the university's board of trustees. "He goes into a room, and when we see white smoke, he's got his hire."

Jurich says of inviting Petrino back, "I don't feel like I'm taking a risk. I've known Bobby since the late 1980s. I know his history. Some of it is good, some of it bad. But I know he's a changed person."

But it's up to Petrino to close the deal, to sell himself as transformed. It's hard work, being changed. It's even harder work *acting* changed—"and Bobby's no actor," says Jurich. "You wouldn't cast him to play a role." After he was fired from Arkansas in April 2012, Petrino says, he and his wife, Becky, moved to a temporary home on a golf course in Rogers, Ark., 23 miles north of the mess he left behind in Fayetteville. He set up one of their three bedrooms as his office and loaded a laptop with All-22 coaching software. The rest of the house, he says, was devoted to saving a relationship that had begun three decades earlier when he and Becky Schaff were students at Carroll College in Helena, Mont. (Asked what year they were married, he says, "Nineteen eighty-five? Maybe? I think." To be fair, a lot of football coaches would be flummoxed by the question.)

"It was just the two of us up there," says Petrino, "and it was work. We went through counseling together. The whole thing was really hard on her." He says they drove from Arkansas to Montana after a death in Bobby's family; then to Fort Collins, Colo., to watch their younger daughter, Katie, play in a tournament with the Cardinals' women's golf team;



HAPPIER DAYS

About four years before his infidelity would nearly break up their marriage, Bobby and Becky celebrated his appointment as Arkansas's football coach in December 2007.

then back to Louisville to watch her play again. All the time, just the two of them in the car. He says they're good now—"the best we've ever been"—but it's taken time. A request to interview Becky was denied.

Petrino made another trip, during the fall of 2012, to Berkeley, Calif., where he says he "clinicked" Cal coach Jeff Tedford and his offensive staff for three days. He spent a day in Nashville with a friend who coaches for the NFL's Titans and another with a friend on the West Alabama staff. Those were social visits. He was frequently in Louisville to watch golf matches. On those trips he noticed people looking at him in airports. "Hard standing there, waiting for your luggage," Petrino says.

"You hear people talking, you feel embarrassed. But some people were supportive, too. And I couldn't just sit in a hole. I really had to get out and go places."

As Petrino tells these stories, he is engaged but ill at ease. He sits upright, two sneakers planted on the carpet as if he's a child serving a timeout. He's trying, pushing the new Bobby, staying on point. When the questioning is steered to disciplinary issues in his first tenure at Louisville, he says, "I don't know about the first time here, but with the situation at Arkansas, I've learned that the No. 1 priority is my family." His older daughter, Kelsey, lives in Louisville with her husband, L.D. Scott, whom Petrino hired as his defensive line coach. The Scotts have two children. "Here's a difference you see in Coach Petrino," says Eric Wood, who played for him at Louisville and is the starting center for the Buffalo Bills. "You see him coming off the practice field grabbing his grandkids with a big smile on his face."

It's likely that the near-breakup of his family has deeply affected Petrino, but this interview is also something of a dance, and a microcosm of the hypocrisy inherent in big-time college sports. Jurich rehired Petrino not because he's a reformed man but because he's a gifted coach—"a genius-level offensive mind," says a member of the Falcons' organization. Nobody in a position of power at Louisville denies this.

Strong quit on Jan. 4, and five days later Jurich hired Petrino after one phone conversation and a long day together on the campus. "I dug deep," says Jurich. But he also hired Petrino to fill seats and generate revenue. "What hire would I make that wouldn't be that way?" he asks. "The biggest criticism I got here

was hiring Rick Pitino for \$1 million a year. How did that work out? There's an incredible excitement with Bobby coming back. All 63 of our suites at Papa John's are sold for the season [at \$50,000 apiece]. There's a waiting list for season tickets."

Blue, the trustee and fan, says, "College sports are a business, first and foremost. People in the Louisville community look forward to attending games and seeing a strong product on the field. Bobby will produce that. This isn't a governor or a mayor we're talking about. This is a football coach." According to a person who attended the meeting at which Petrino's hiring was unanimously approved by the athletic board, "There was discussion, but there was nothing about marital infidelity. It was mostly Bobby's flight risk. Is he going to leave again?"

But Petrino is most famous outside college football's bubble for hiring his young lover to work in the Razorbacks' football office, wrecking a motorcycle with her aboard and then keeping it from his employer for four days. You can't bring back *that* guy to coach your student-athletes without some public assurance that he has served penance and re-embraced certain values, and if that's actually true, all the better. But Petrino's extramarital affair is only part of a deeper pattern. Petrino, who has been a coach since he graduated from college 31 years ago, has a brilliant football mind, but his career has been marked by megalomania, immaturity and disloyalty. Perhaps, at 53, he has outgrown those weaknesses. Louisville will know soon enough.

But consider this: As SI reported this story, a source with ties to members of the Cardinals' football program provided information that was then presented to Petrino for confirmation or denial. Just hours after this exchange, Petrino called a staff meeting and, according to the source, who spoke anonymously because he is still employed in athletics, said, "Shut your f----- mouths about things that go on in my building. Things are getting out. Guys are talking. If you're not happy, get the f--- out and leave."

I T COMES AS no surprise that Petrino is the son of a coach. Bob (Putter) Petrino Sr., now 77 and suffering from Parkinson's disease, was a football, basketball and baseball star at Butte (Mont.) Central High. He became a high school coach in his mid-20s, and in 1971, at 34, he took over the athletics program at Carroll College, an NAIA school in the state capital, Helena. In 28 years Putter won 64.4% of his games, earning 16 Frontier Conference titles and nine appearances in the NAIA playoffs. He did all of this by sticking with the triple-option veer offense,



DARK KNIGHTS

Louisville fans swarmed the home field in November 2006 after Petrino and quarterback Brian Brohm (12) engineered a 44-34 Blackout triumph.

which was created in the late 1960s, and by demanding discipline and effort.

"Bobby's dad expected you to work hard," says Tim Burton, who played for Putter—and with Bobby—at Carroll from 1978 through '81 and is now chief of staff for Montana governor Steve Bullock. "You ran onto the field for practice, and you ran off afterward. If we had a bad practice, there was a hill next to the field. It was 50 or 75 yards. Bobby's dad would decide how many times we ran up that hill. He made sure we were prepared. And he had a deeper understanding of the game than most."

Putter Petrino had two sons: Bobby was born in March 1961 and Paul, who is now the coach at Idaho, six years later. At around age two Bobby started going to his father's high school practices. Later, on game days, he charted offensive plays. Back home in the backyard he and his friends ran the simple, efficient plays—Option at 4, Option at 5—for fun. "I knew at a young age," says Bobby, "that I was going to be a coach someday."

First, though, he was a player. As a senior he was the starting quarterback at Helena's Capital High, running for 11 touchdowns and passing for 11 more. "He was the smartest kid on the team, and the toughest, and the best athlete," says one high school and college teammate (who didn't want his name used because, he said, "I don't want to get involved in any Petrino drama"). According to a 2004 article in the *Independent Record*, a Helena newspaper, the state championship game of Bobby's senior year was played in temperatures that dipped to -18° and is remembered as the Frozen Bowl. Bobby went on an 80-yard touchdown run and scored the game-winner on a sneak from the one.

He matriculated at Carroll and became the starting quarterback as a 5' 11", 170-pound sophomore. In three seasons he led his father's Fighting Saints to



three straight conference titles and was a two-time conference MVP. “One of the toughest guys I’ve ever known,” says Burton. “When it came to crunch time, we just knew Bobby would make a play for us.” Bobby played basketball, too, averaging 20.0 points as a senior and surpassing 1,000 in his career.

After college he went straight into coaching. He spent three years under his father and was already a nine-year coaching veteran in 1992, when he was hired as Bruce Snyder’s quarterbacks coach at Arizona State. One of his players there was Jake Plummer, a skinny freshman from Boise who would play 10 seasons in the NFL.

Plummer had never met anyone like Petrino. “Kind of small, but really cocky,” says Plummer, now a studio analyst for Pac-12 football telecasts. “Not a jerk, but he rubbed me the wrong way at first. Petrino was this in-your-face dude who knew way more about football than I did.” Plummer recalls Petrino as a stickler for tiny details, such as precision in drawing plays on a whiteboard. “There aren’t any lines on those boards,” says Plummer, “and we would draw a 10-yard hook and Petrino would yell at us, ‘I said 10 yards!’ We’d look at him like, ‘Coach, there’s no lines on the board.’ But he wanted it perfect.”

Plummer caught some undercurrents of disagreement between Petrino and his boss, Snyder, over offensive philosophy. Snyder, who died in 2009, was more of a two-running-back, tight end coach. “Petrino wanted to spread it out and throw it around,” says Plummer. “I was kind of mellow, and he pushed me to be a leader. I learned to love the guy.”

Petrino stayed only two years in Tempe before hitting the road for five more stops in 10 years, including a season as offensive coordinator at Louisville (1998) and three seasons as quarterbacks coach and then offensive coordinator with the Jacksonville Jaguars (’99 through 2001). He ran Tommy Tuberville’s offense at Auburn in ’02 before Jurich brought him back to Louisville for his first head coaching gig, at 41.

There’s no debating Petrino’s success with the Cardinals. They won Conference USA in 2004 and the Big East in ’06, and in each of those years they won a bowl game and finished No. 6 in the AP poll, best in the school’s history. But problems arose off the field. Petrino was on the cusp of the offensive explosion that overtook college (and pro) football in the 2000s—his ’04 team scored 49.8 points per game—and every college athletic director and NFL general manager with a coaching vacancy saw Petrino as a chalkboard savant who could shred defenses. He didn’t handle the attention appropriately. In ’03 he met secretly with Auburn representatives while Tuberville was still coach. A year later he met

with LSU representatives when Nick Saban left for the Dolphins. “He was a first-time [head] coach, and everybody was coming at [him],” Jurich says forgivingly. “It was a lot to deal with.”

Petrino’s own program, meanwhile, was struggling with discipline problems that wouldn’t become fully apparent until he was gone, and his successor, Steve Kragthorpe, began dismissing Petrino’s recruits. (Some other players quit.) In a 2008 interview with Eric Crawford of the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, Jurich laid the blame at Petrino’s feet: “Bobby went to areas where he thought he was strong recruiting, and some of them panned

“College sports are a business, first and foremost,” says Blue. “This ISN’T A GOVERNOR OR A MAYOR WE’RE TALKING ABOUT. This is a football coach.”

out and some didn’t. . . . We cleared 21 kids out of here, and that’s a lot. That’s a big hit for anybody to take. . . . But we want to do things the right way.”

Players from that era recall a Wild West atmosphere that included widespread gun use. “It was a bunch of tough guys,” says Craig James, a cornerback from Jacksonville who signed with Louisville in 2005, then left the program and finished at Northern Iowa. “Coach Petrino and his staff went to the slums. When you go to those bad neighborhoods and you bring kids from the streets to a university, sometimes you bring the streets in with them. Guns and fights—I mean we would have riots.”

Today Jurich takes the hit for Petrino. “I should have given Bobby more oversight,” he says. “Not so much in recruiting, because I think Bobby took the same kind of players we’ve always taken. But we had issues once those players got here. I should have done a better job watching his players. And this time around I will be more helpful in that regard.”

There were also many Cardinals who flourished under Petrino and relished the experience. Wood, who developed into a first-round NFL draft pick at Louisville, says, “I saw countless players who could not handle Coach Petrino’s style of coaching. He demands excellence, and he’s not warm and fuzzy. He never lets you feel comfortable as a player. If you can handle it mentally, you’ll be a good football player and a good person off the field.”

Petrino knows his reputation. “Development of

the player has always been huge to me,” he says. “This time I’m trying to be better at knowing the person. I will say this: Football is a hard game. And players need to be in the locker room complaining about their coaches, because that’s when they bond.”

SIX DAYS AFTER Louisville’s 24–13 win over Wake Forest in the 2007 Orange Bowl, Petrino signed a five-year, \$24 million contract with the Falcons. At the time Michael

Vick was a six-year veteran with a history of sensational playmaking mixed with wild inconsistency (71 touchdown passes and 52 interceptions). The Atlanta brain trust saw Petrino as a mentor to Vick. That never came to be. Word of Vick’s involvement in the Bad Newz Kennels broke in April 2007, and in August the quarterback was suspended by NFL commissioner Roger Goodell.

“It was over for us in May, and Bobby knew it,” says a member of the Falcons’ organization during the Petrino days. “He did a terrible job of handling it. Instead of burrowing in and making the best of a tough situation, he became angry. He’s like that 15-year-old boy who’s just a competitor, and if he loses, it’s somebody else’s fault. He was immature. He just couldn’t handle adversity. And in the pro game you’re going to have things go wrong.” Petrino resigned from the Falcons on Dec. 11, with three games left in the season. He never spoke to the team; instead he left a laminated four-sentence note in each player’s locker. Veteran safety Lawyer Milloy wrote COWARD on the note and displayed it for media members. Petrino also tried to leave without speaking to the assistant coaches he had hired, but he was coaxed into a room with them by Falcons executives. That same night he was named the Razorbacks’ coach. Even seven years later Petrino can’t summon a full apology for his embarrassing departure. “That’s the hard thing on coaches,” he says. “When there are jobs that come open, the AD wants to hire you, and he’s not interested in how you leave a job. That Arkansas job was an opportunity that wasn’t going to be there three or four weeks down the road.”

In Fayetteville, Petrino got the Hogs to 10–3 and 11–2 in the final two of his four seasons. He lost a 65–43 shootout to Cam Newton’s Auburn in 2010, and he fell to Alabama both years. One of those losses was competitive (24–20 in ’10), the other was not (38–14 in ’11). Petrino’s offense rang up points, and its members loved playing for him. “He was tough,” says Ryan Mallett, Arkansas’s quarterback in ’09 and ’10, “and he wanted tough players. Anybody who couldn’t deal with that, that’s their

\$24
MILLION
Total value
of the five-
year contract
Petrino
signed with
the Falcons
and then gave
up late in his
first season.

× × × × × × × ×

40
National
ranking of
Petrino’s
Louisville
recruiting
class by
Rivals.com,
which also
ranked the
class seventh
in the ACC.



loss. I’ll tell you what: We were always prepared.”

Mallett recalled a fourth-quarter fourth-and-three from LSU’s 39-yard line in late November 2010. “Coach Petrino called me over and said, ‘Are you ready to run 80 Pass?’” says Mallett. “That was a double move for [wide receiver] Joe Adams on the Honey Badger [LSU safety Tyrann Mathieu]. We had that play in all year and never used it.” Mallett threw for a touchdown that gave the Razorbacks a 28–20 lead en route to a 31–23 victory.

Others at Arkansas recall Petrino less fondly. According to a member of the athletic department staff during Petrino’s tenure who spoke on condition of anonymity, Petrino was verbally abusive. “He came into the university and said people just didn’t have a commitment,” says the staffer. “It didn’t matter how many years they had put in.” The staff member said Petrino employed the epithet *mother-----* so liberally that athletic department members nicknamed him BMFP, for Bobby Mother----- Petrino.

He could be particularly rough on his assistant coaches. Two individuals with connections to the Arkansas program during Petrino’s tenure told SI that they once saw Petrino throw defensive line coach Bobby Allen to the floor. Petrino was incensed that a Razorbacks defensive lineman had thrown an offensive lineman into the legs of another offensive lineman during a practice, risking injury. Petrino denies throwing Allen down. Allen, still with the Arkansas athletic department, declined to comment.

But Petrino’s behavior was trumped by making Arkansas a player in the brutal SEC West. In December 2010 the school rewarded him with a seven-year contract worth \$3.56 million annually.

Seventeen months later that deal was terminated for cause after the motorcycle crash near Fayetteville. Petrino was driving the bike with former Arkansas volleyball player Jessica Dorrell, then 25, on the back, but he didn’t tell athletic director Jeff Long that she had been with him, nor did he mention her in a press conference two days after the crash. A university investigation found that Petrino had been involved with Dorrell for a “significant” amount of time; had hired her to work in the football office over 158 other candidates; and had made her a gift of \$20,000. An emotional Long said Petrino had “engaged in a pattern of misleading and manipulative behavior designed to deceive me and members of the athletic staff both before and after the motorcycle accident.”

At home in Colorado, Jake Plummer heard the news and thought, *Aw, Coach*. . . In Atlanta, Falcons officials left over from Petrino’s time started referring to him as Easy Rider.



EVEN IN THE flames of Petrino's departure from Arkansas, there was little doubt he would return to the sideline. Western Kentucky threw him the first lifeline, a four-year contract with a base salary of \$850,000. He got the Hilltoppers to 8–4, which was slightly better than Willie Taggart's 7–5. But even that short tenure was not without controversy.



In September, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* published an investigative story detailing the complicated relationship between athletic trainers and football coaches. Reporter Brad Wolverton wrote that Petrino clashed frequently with trainer Danny Cobble: “Mr. Cobble says the coach also questioned his medical abilities, was impatient with return-to-play times, and pushed back on physicians’ decisions.” Cobble was eventually fired.

Meanwhile, Charlie Strong guided the Cardinals to a 12–1 record in 2013 and a 36–9 rout of Miami in the Russell Athletic Bowl. When Strong took the Texas job after the new year, Jurich says he felt blindsided—and was deeply embittered. “There’s one guy who took care of Charlie when he’d been passed over for 27 years, one guy who hired him,” Jurich says. “I never envisioned him leaving. But he earned the right.”

Jurich says his list to replace Strong was seven names deep, and Petrino was on it, with Ramsey’s blessing. Jurich and Petrino had lost contact during the coach’s time at Arkansas, but they had reconnected in the fall of 2012 during a three-hour lunch meeting in Jurich’s suite on the 20-yard line at Papa John’s. Their next meeting, on

HIGH HOPES
The enthusiasm throughout Louisville for Petrino’s return to the sideline has been reflected in season-ticket sales at Papa John’s, for which there’s a waiting list.

Jan. 8, under intense pressure with the approach of national signing day, sold Jurich.

There has been scant outcry in Louisville over Petrino’s hiring. Even before he returned, a bedsheet was hung from the campus athletic center, inscribed with the words BRING BACK BOBBY. Many former Cardinals rushed to social media to support Petrino’s hiring. In June, Petrino established the Petrino

Family Foundation and pledged more than \$1 million for the Kosair Children’s Hospital trauma program, a scholarship program for Louisville students, and the university’s marching band. According to Linnie Meyer, executive director of the Kosair Children’s Hospital Foundation, Petrino donated \$250,000 during his first tenure at Louisville. “I know there have been issues with Coach and his family,” says Meyer. “All I can say is, in my relationship with the Petrino family, they have been people of compassion and integrity.”

Upon his hiring Petrino gathered a recruiting class composed of his own signees and players salvaged from Strong’s efforts. It includes six junior college transfers. It is also ranked No. 40 in the nation by Rivals.com and seventh in the ACC. Petrino’s partial 2015 class,

just nine recruits so far, is ranked No. 61. The coach’s ability to conjure victories will instantly be tested. On this matter his record shrieks: just one losing season in nine as a college coach.

BACK IN THE office now, nearly 80 minutes of interviewing have passed. Petrino allows himself to reminisce. “I remember when I first started coaching,” he says, “I was thinking, Boy I wish I knew all this stuff when I was a player.” That was football stuff, back in 1983 with his father, coaching the option. And then at Weber State, coaching an early spread offense, learning that teaching is different from competing. The knowledge required to do the job often comes long after the job is awarded. It wasn’t just X’s and O’s; it was maturity, which Petrino clearly lacked. He says he wasn’t ready: “When I was here and got my first head coaching job, it came at me fast. Over the years I brought things on myself. And then people give you second chances.”

Outside, the big stadium lies quiet. A green field awaits games. Red seats await fans. The scoreboard awaits touchdowns. □



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BY ZAC ELLIS

HEISMAN WATCH

Sixteen players—some considered shoo-ins for a nomination; others, not so much—and just one little bronze statue. . . . Here's how SI sees the field



FRONT-RUNNERS

NAME RECOGNITION, EYE-POPPING NUMBERS AND MAJOR EXPOSURE—THESE ARE THE IDEAL INGREDIENTS



QB

MARCUS MARIOTA

Oregon, RS junior ▶
3,665 pass yds., 31 TDs;
715 rush yds., 9 TDs

The catalyst of a rapid-fire offense will surely contend for the trophy if the Ducks handle their business in the Pac-12.

QB

BRETT HUNDLEY

UCLA, RS junior
3,071 pass yds., 24 TDs;
748 rush yds., 11 TDs

Hundley is well-practiced, entering his third season as a starter, and he has plenty of big-time matchups (Texas, Oregon, Stanford) on the schedule.

RB

TODD GURLEY

Georgia, junior ▲
989 rush yds., 10 TDs;
441 receiving yds., 6 TDs*

He might've joined the 2013 finalists in NYC if not for a September ankle sprain. With the Dawgs breaking in a new QB, this is Gurley's time to shine.

QB

BRAXTON MILLER

Ohio State, senior
2,094 pass yds., 24 TDs;
1,068 rush yds., 12 TDs*

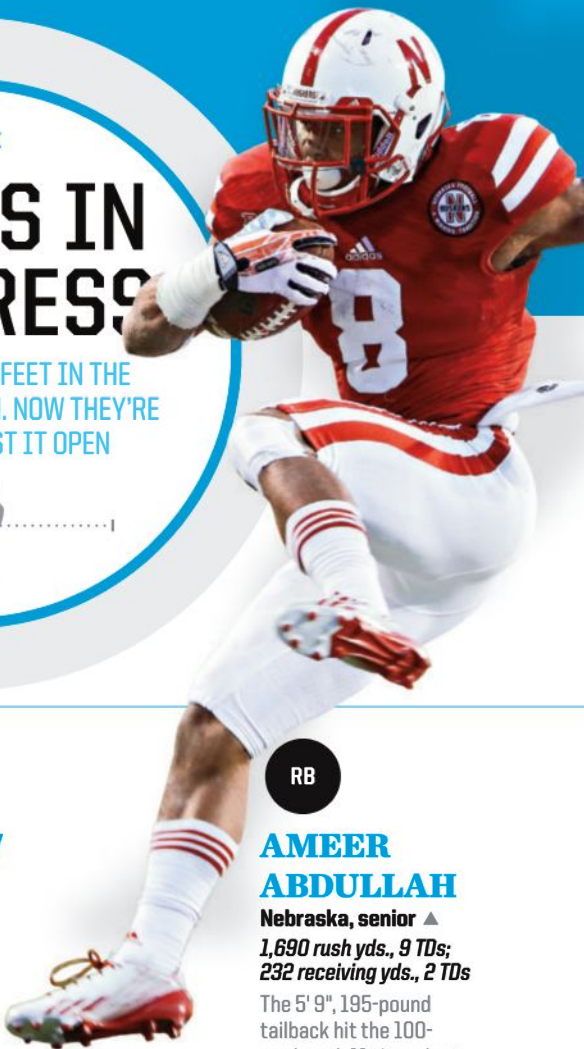
The two-time Big Ten offensive player of the year has 26 wins as a starter and could break the school record of 36. He just needs to stay healthy.





WORKS IN PROGRESS

THEY GOT THEIR FEET IN THE DOOR LAST SEASON. NOW THEY'RE POISED TO BUST IT OPEN



WR

ANTWAN GOODLEY

Baylor, RS senior ▼

71 receptions,
1,339 yds., 13 TDs

Having played 37 career games already, he should again be QB Bryce Petty's top target in an offense that ranked No. 1 in the FBS last year.

RB

AMEER ABDULLAH

Nebraska, senior ▲

1,690 rush yds., 9 TDs;
232 receiving yds., 2 TDs

The 5' 9", 195-pound tailback hit the 100-yard mark 11 times last season, and his rushing total was the highest for a

QB

JAMEIS WINSTON

Fla. State, RS sophomore ▲

4,057 pass yds., 40 TDs;
219 rush yds., 4 TDs

Ohio State RB Archie Griffin is the only owner of Heisman bookends (1974 and '75), but with a loaded squad and a soft schedule, Winston could join him.



JONATHAN FERREY/GETTY IMAGES (MARIOTA); JOHN BAZEMORE/AP (GURLEY); STEPHEN M. DOWELL/ORLANDO SENTINEL/MCT/LANDOV (WINSTON); MANNY FLORES/CAL SPORT MEDIA (GOODLEY); NATI HARNIK/AP (ABDULLAH); DAVID E. KLUTHO/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (MARSHALL); KEVIN C. COX/GETTY IMAGES (PRESCOTT); DAVID EULITT FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (MAUK); CHARLES BAUS/CSM/LANDOV (JACK)



QB

TREVOR KNIGHT

Oklahoma, RS sophomore

819 pass yds., 9 TDs;
445 rush yds., 2 TDs*

His stock skyrocketed with a win over Alabama in last year's Sugar Bowl. If the Sooners contend in the Big 12, it will be because this dual threat had a big year.

QB

NICK MARSHALL

Auburn, senior ▲

1,976 pass yds., 14 TDs;
1,068 rush yds., 12 TDs*

The first-year starter blew through SEC D's with his feet in 2013. The Tigers want him to throw more in '14, which could make him a Trophy-worthy talent.

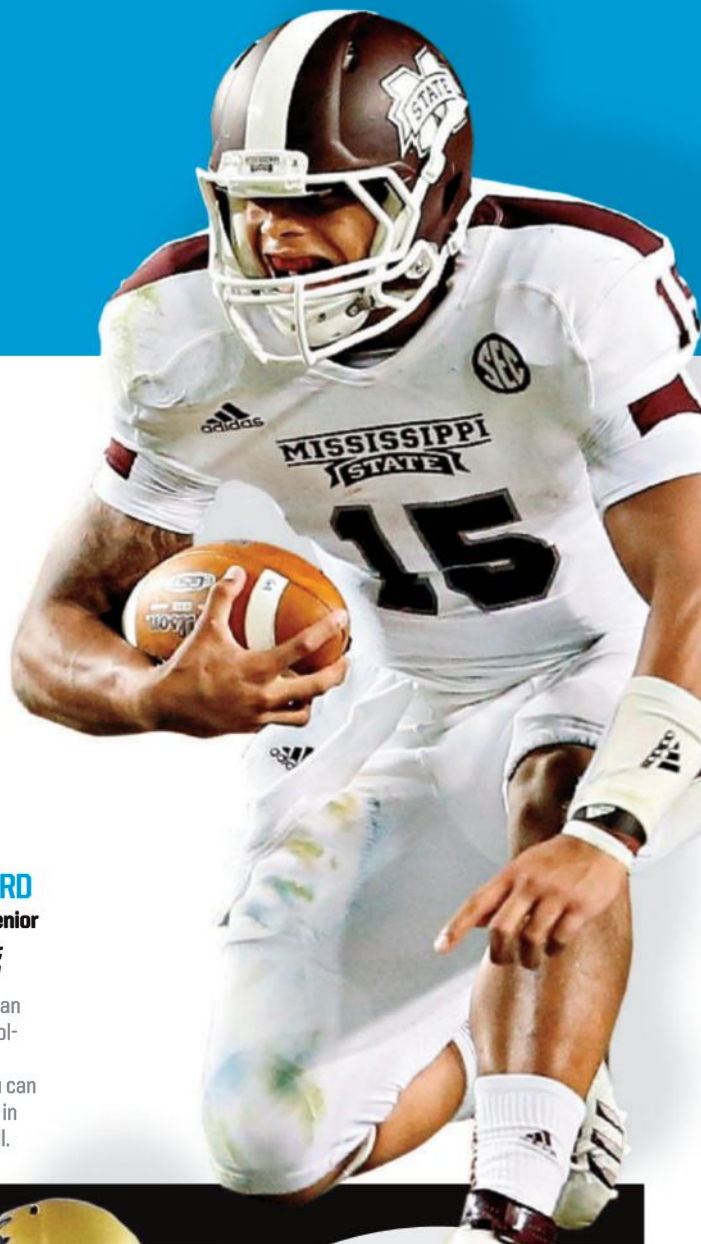
RB

JEREMY LANGFORD

Michigan State, RS senior

1,422 rush yds., 18 TDs;
157 receiving yds., 1 TD

The 6'1" 208-pounder ran for 100 yards in a school-record eight straight games last year, so you can bet he'll be showcased in Sparty's attack this fall.



*Did not play full 2013 season
† High school stats



DARK HORSES

DON'T BE SHOCKED IF—WITH THE RIGHT STATS AND STREAKS—THESE GUYS SNEAK INTO THE CONVERSATION



QB

DAK PRESCOTT

◀ Mississippi State, RS junior

1,940 pass yds., 10 TDs;

*829 rush yds., 13 TDs**

Prescott started only seven games last year, but the fleet-footed runner returns with a veteran supporting cast in Starkville.

RB

LEONARD FOURNETTE

LSU, freshman

1,792 rushing yds., 16 TDs;

745 receiving yds., 6 TDs†

The hype surrounding this 19-year-old is palpable in Baton Rouge. The 6'1", 225-pound back could be the next freshman to hoist the Heisman.

WR

AMARI COOPER

Alabama, junior

*45 receptions for 736 yds., 4 TDs**

While the Tide's ground game gets most of the attention, Cooper will be the most lethal edge weapon in new offensive coordinator Lane Kiffin's game plans.

QB

MATY MAUK

◀◀ Missouri, RS sophomore

1,071 pass yds., 11 TDs;

*229 rush yds., 1 TD**

He came on late in 2013 and looked like a seasoned vet during a surprise run to the Cotton Bowl. He's one of the few SEC passers with experience.

RB

LB

MYLES JACK

◀ UCLA, sophomore

267 rush yds., 7 TDs;

76 tackles, 7 TFLs, 2 INTs

Only one defensive player (Charles Woodson, 1997) has won the Heisman, but this double threat has a shot if the Bruins take the Pac-12.





BY MARTIN RICKMAN

Photograph by
Brian Smith
For Sports Illustrated

Even though he put up Johnny Football-like numbers last year, most people have never heard of Rakeem Cato—much less put him on any Heisman short lists. That doesn't matter to the Marshall quarterback. He's overcome far greater odds just to get this far

THE LONG SHOT



RAKEEM CATO STANDS among his teammates dressed in a white number 12 Marshall jersey. There's a gray beanie on his head and a tight beard covering his face. The team makes up a small part of the hundreds of students, fans and residents of Huntington, W.Va., who fill the courtyard outside the school's student center on a sunny April day. They have gathered, as they do each year, to turn on Memorial Fountain, a tribute to the 75 Thundering Herd players, coaches and boosters who lost their lives in the crash of Southern Airways Flight 932 on Nov. 14, 1970.

"Once you are here, you have a new and permanent home," says Sam Botek Jr., a tight end on the first Marshall team pulled together after the crash, which was dramatized in the 2006 movie *We Are Marshall*. "You truly become a son and daughter of Marshall." A few minutes later the fountain is switched on. As the water flows and the crowd breaks up, people begin to flock to Cato. Kids swarm him, asking for pictures, handshakes and autographs. He smiles at all of them.

By the time the senior quarterback leaves campus, he'll likely have more passing yards than anyone in school history and possibly a Heisman Trophy. In his first three seasons Cato threw for 10,176 yards, within striking distance of school record-holder Chad Pennington (13,143). Last year alone Cato threw for 3,916 yards and tied Pennington's mark for touchdown passes in a season (39). With a pedestrian schedule and a veteran team of 15 returning starters, Cato could easily surpass his 2013 numbers while leading his team to a 12-0 record and a place in the C-USA title game—the kind of season that gets the attention of Heisman voters.

For all the noteworthy things he has accomplished, however, the most remarkable thing might be that Cato, who was raised in Miami's downtrodden Liberty City neighborhood, ended up at Marshall in the first place. "He's about the most special kid I've ever been around," says coach Doc Holliday. "I've been around some good ones. I don't know if I've ever been around a quarterback who's gone through the adversity and has come as far as he has to be where he is."

× × × × × × × ×

39

TD passes thrown by Cato in 2013, tying Pennington for the school record.



GROWING UP [where I did] you could barely sleep at night," says Cato. "You heard gunshots every night. People getting killed and murdered every night." Cato's father, Keith Jones, was jailed for second-degree murder and armed robbery in 1986 and has spent most of Rakeem's life in prison.

Two things allowed Rakeem to endure. The first was his mother, Juannese Cato, who worked two jobs to provide for her seven kids. "If anybody was in need or they got in trouble in school," says Rakeem's sister Shanrikia, "she took over. She spoiled every last one of us. I don't know how she did it."

The other was football. When he was six, Cato started spending his days in nearby Gwen Cherry Park, which was turned into an oasis for neighborhood kids in 1996 with the help of a \$1 million donation from the NFL's Youth Education Town program. There Cato met Tommy Shuler, who quickly became his best friend. They spent most days together at the park, and at the age of six, they joined the Gwen Cherry Bulls Pop Warner football team. The game gave Cato purpose and an outlet for his anger and energy.

"There are so many bad influences, and when you come up in the heart of the s---, you know a lot of those people," says Luther Campbell, the former front man of 2LiveCrew who used some of his rap earnings to cofound the Liberty City Optimist Club, a youth sports program for kids between the ages of four and 16. "[Cato] never really hung out with those people. But he had to walk past that to get to the bus. It's so easy to not get on the bus one day and stand on that corner."

Campbell, 53, first met Cato when the Bulls played



his grandparents, Campbell, Shuler and T.Y. Hilton, another Pop Warner teammate who's now a wide receiver for the Colts. "This is a kid who [for a long time] no one hugged and told him they loved him," says Campbell, who became a mentor. "People don't know that about him; he just wants a hug."

"No one can understand what he was going through when he lost his mom," Hilton says. "We just kind of took him in, raised him from there. At that point, some people would've given up their dreams."

Rakeem clutched his dream even tighter. Football was all he had left.

TWO YEARS AFTER his mom died, Rakeem arrived at Miami Springs High, where Hilton was already enrolled and which counts NFL stars Willis McGahee and Lomas Brown among its former players.

Although only a freshman, Rakeem established himself as the starting varsity quarterback by the time classes started. Over the next three years he threw for 6,424 yards and 72 touchdowns, with 17 interceptions. But the team struggled, going 19–9 without a playoff appearance.

The losses wore on Cato, so after his junior season he transferred to Miami Central High, where Campbell was an assistant. Coach Telly Lockette, now the running backs coach at USF, was building a powerhouse behind players like Charles Gaines Jr. (Louisville), Devonta Freeman (Florida State) and Durell Eskridge (Syracuse). To further bolster the ranks, Cato recruited Shuler, a wide receiver, to join him. Lockette, who had coached quarterbacks Jeffrey Godfrey (UCF) and Jacory Harris (Miami), first watched Cato play in middle school and liked what he saw. "He was the kid that was going to be a great one," Lockette said. "It was just a matter of time."

That time almost ended as soon as it began. After an early-season win at Madison (Texas) High, Cato exploded, yelling at teammates and coaches. The outburst led to a coach's meeting about Cato's future with the team. He was allowed to stay only after Campbell agreed to take charge of him. "His personality was so feisty, and he was very outspoken," says Campbell. "He could rub some people the wrong way."

Given one last chance, Cato kept his cool and led his team to the playoffs, where he shone in a 42–27 win over a loaded Miami Northwestern squad headed by Teddy Bridgewater, now a rookie QB with the Vikings. Cato finished his senior year with 2,988 yards, 31 touchdowns and six interceptions, leading his team to the 6A state title and earning

FATHER FIGURE
Cato and Holliday (below) had their problems at the start, but the quarterback's ability to put his past behind him and connect with the coach led to improved production.



the Optimist Club. Cato was about 12 and already making a name for himself as a football player. "Everybody in town knew about Cato," Campbell says.

With his mother providing a stable home and Gwen Cherry offering a safe haven, Rakeem was on the well-worn path from Miami's inner city to Division I stardom.

Until one night shortly after Rakeem's 13th birthday, in April 2005, when Juannese became ill. Rakeem's two oldest siblings, Antwain and Shanrikia, took her to the hospital in an ambulance after the younger siblings were put to bed. Rakeem went to school in the morning, and while he was there, Juannese succumbed to pneumonia. She was 39. "We never knew she was sick until she died," Shanrikia says. "I'm kind of happy we never knew."

Shanrikia, 18, and with a child of her own, was granted custody of all her siblings except Antwain, who was 23 and living on his own. Their grandfather Eddie Green, a lumberyard worker, helped provide for them. He bought school supplies and backpacks, and if the kids had trouble paying the bills, Green would pitch in.

But nothing was the same. Even with all his brothers and sisters at home, Rakeem felt lonely and haunted. Juannese's absence was inescapable. "He didn't want to stay in the house with his mother not there," Green says. "He missed her that much."

Within months the family moved to public housing in the Overtown neighborhood, which was as dangerous as Liberty City. Rakeem became convinced that he could rely on no one but himself and grew nearly obsessed with the idea of "being a man." He walled off his emotions and began staying with relatives and friends around Miami, including Antwain,

a trip to the Nike South Florida All-Star game.

Despite his success, Cato attracted sparse recruiting attention. Local stars like Bridgewater and Godfrey (a year ahead) overshadowed him, and although he was listed at 6' 1", coaches feared he was too short to be a big-time college quarterback.

Except for one. Between Cato's sophomore and junior seasons Florida International offensive coordinator Bill Legg visited Miami Springs on a recruiting trip. As the coach watched a 7-on-7 camp, he noticed how Cato was "running the show," directing traffic and leading others in drills. He was impressed, and the following fall FIU offered Cato a scholarship. It was a mixed blessing, since it would allow Cato to play Division I ball, but it would also keep him home, where the distractions and memories lingered. "I wanted him to get out of Miami," Green says. No other offers materialized, though, so before his senior year Cato made a verbal pledge to the Panthers.

But after the season Legg took over as the offensive coordinator at Marshall and offered Cato a scholarship. As fate would have it, Shuler had already committed to the Thundering Herd, and in a twist he now recruited Cato to join him in West Virginia. It wasn't an easy decision, but in January 2011, Cato flipped from FIU to Marshall.

CATO WAS NAMED the starter as a true freshman, but he struggled with the transition. Once on campus Cato stayed up all night, showed up for meetings late and acted out. In weightlifting sessions he could barely lift the bar. Cato had taught himself to be a man without really knowing what that meant. "Rakeem had to learn how to be self-reliant at a very early age," Legg says. "When you're giving yourself the answers to the questions, they might seem right, but they're not always the right answers."

In high school Cato could get away with skipping a class or showing up late for practice. No one even cared where he slept. "Other kids were going home to mom and dad," Campbell says. "He wasn't going home to nothing." But at Marshall even his eating habits were monitored and regimented.

Cato had his moments early on, including a

HELPING HANDS

Cato has leaned on former Marshall star Leftwich (below, far left) and his best friend since age five, Shuler (below, 1), who's both his teammate and roommate.



× × × × × × × ×

69.5

Cato's completion percentage in 2012, a season in which he threw for 4,201 yards and 37 TDs.



three-touchdown performance in a 26–20 win over Southern Miss and strong play in a 17–13 defeat of Bridgewater and Louisville, but his act wore thin with Holliday, who sat the quarterback in October after a disastrous performance in a 16–6 loss at UCF. The shock was enough that for a moment Cato questioned his desire to keep playing but chose to stick it out. "I knew what I wanted to do and what I had to do to be successful," Cato says. "I had to man up really fast. I missed my family, but I had to stay out of trouble and focus on school and football."

Within a few weeks he had regained the starting job, and in the final game of the season he led

Marshall to a 20–10 win over his friend Hilton and FIU in the Beef 'O' Brady's Bowl while throwing for 226 yards and two touchdowns.

"Football has always been his sanctuary," Campbell says. "He can go, and he doesn't have to worry

about anything. I know deep down he plays for his mom." The difference came when he started playing for his new family too.

MARSHALL'S FOOTBALL TEAM means everything to the city of Huntington. The 75 people killed in the plane crash are never far from the community's mind. Get a drink at a local bar and a patron will mention someone he knew from the crash. Take a tour of the campus and the guide will point out filming locations from *We Are Marshall*.

"Just walking by a stranger down the street, they're going to speak and make eye contact," Cato says. "It's the smaller things that really matter in the community. Huntington made me see a lot of things that I haven't seen before in Miami. Where I'm from, you just walk past and you keep going."

Cato blossomed as a sophomore, even if the team's 5–7 record didn't reflect it. He completed 69.5% of his passes and threw for 4,201 yards with 37 touchdowns. He took the next step as a junior; he started letting people in, building relationships with his teammates, Legg and Holliday. The results were eye-opening: Cato passed for just short of 4,000 yards as Marshall went 10–4, the first time since 2002 the Thundering Herd reached a double-digit win total.



After torching Maryland for 337 yards with three scores in a Military Bowl win last December, he entered the off-season with lofty expectations. But he had other matters on his agenda. Having strengthened his ties within his football family, he sought to do the same with his biological clan.

Cato reached out to his father. After several stints in prison, Jones had gotten out in 2012. Rakeem has met with his dad in Miami, but building a connection with a man he knows almost nothing about is a process. When the two are together, they talk mostly about life and football. “That’s my father,” Cato says. “He will be up [to Huntington] for a game this year. That’ll be a lot of fun. Right now we’re just talking and trying to get to know each other.”

Cato also has two young daughters, Jaela, 2, who lives in Miami, while Chloe, 1, is in Huntington. Even though he didn’t have a traditional family dynamic growing up, his experiences taught him the type of parent he wants to be. Says Campbell, “A lot of these kids are put in these bad situations where they lost everything, and they become the best parents in the world.”

THE DAY BEFORE Marshall’s spring game Cato walks around campus with Pennington and ESPN analyst Herm Edwards. The game acts as a homecoming for the Thundering
× × × Herd family. Eagles defensive end Vinny Curry brings a film crew. Pennington and Byron Leftwich coach the teams, and on the first play Pennington steps under center and tosses a quick



“Football has always **BEEN HIS SANCTUARY**,” Campbell says. “He can go, and he doesn’t have to worry about anything.”

out route to Randy Moss, to the crowd’s delight.

Cato appreciates the continuity and deep roots the alumni represent, and he knows he can reach out to elders like Pennington and Leftwich when needed. “At this level when you get to the point where he’s at, it’s bigger than X’s and O’s,” Leftwich says. “We try to help him understand that we know what he’s going through. We can help him because we’ve seen it, and he hasn’t seen it all yet.”

Cato compares himself with the Seahawk’s Russell Wilson, another short, accurate QB who can run and extend plays but looks to throw first.

“Somebody out there is going to take a shot on him, and they’re going to be pleasantly surprised because of his intangibles,” says Legg. “There are a number of smaller quarterbacks in the league, and they’re all dealing with the same issues, but a couple of them are pretty good and they’re able to overcome it. I think he will as well.”

“I’ve heard people say he may be the most underrated player in college football,” says Holliday. “If you look at what he’s accomplished to this point and what he has ahead of him, he might be.”

Cato goes back to Gwen Cherry when he’s home. The park that meant so much to him as a kid now serves a similar purpose to a new generation. And he’s trying his best to help them on the way. “When he does come down, they have football practice out there with the smaller guys,” Shanrikia said. “They go out there playing and stuff. They love Rakeem.”

The next Rakeem Cato might be out there at Gwen Cherry. Maybe all he wants is a hug. □



FLORIDA STATE

1.

SUGAR BOWL



OHIO STATE

4.

20
SCOUTING

WELCOME TO THE FUTURE. Or at least to the long-awaited present, a world with a college football playoff. Starting on Oct. 28, a 13-person committee will issue the first of seven rankings based on, among other factors, head-to-head matchups, common opponents and strength of schedule. The top four as of Dec. 7 will play semifinals on New Year's Day, with No. 1 meeting No. 4 and No. 2 playing No. 3. The winners will face off for the title on Monday, Jan. 12, at AT&T

14

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REPORTS

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2.

ALABAMA

x
ROSE
BOWL

OKLAHOMA

3.

Stadium in Arlington, Texas.

The new ranking system informed our writers' perspective when they puzzled out SI's Top 25. First, which teams were most likely to make the playoff—and why? And, what would the next 21 need to do to earn a spot in the bracket? The team-by-team breakdowns include an evaluation by a rival coach and a Power Ranking (a mix of percentile calculations and academic grading on a scale of 60 to 100). This should help fill the time until the games begin.

GARY BOGDON FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (FLORIDA STATE); VASHA HUNT/AL.COM/LANDOV (ALABAMA); WILLIAM PURNELL/ICON SMI (OKLAHOMA); THEARON W. HENDERSON/GETTY IMAGES (OHIO STATE)

1.

FLORIDA
STATE

BY ANDY STAPLES

ANSWER MEN

As his team prepared to take the field for its first preseason practice after winning the national championship, coach Jimbo Fisher posed a pair of questions. "Once you're up on that podium, do you really want to walk off?" Fisher asked. And: "How important is it to stay on that podium?"

Both had been answered in part last January: After Florida State's 34-31 win over Auburn for a 14-0 finish and the final title of the BCS era, only four players (WR Kelvin Benjamin, DT Timmy Jernigan and RBs Devonta Freeman and James Wilder Jr.) left early for the NFL. Senior tackle Cam Erving and senior guard Tre Jackson stayed, meaning Florida State will brink back four-fifths of its offensive line. Wideout Rashad Greene, who has led the team in catches and receiving yards in each of his three seasons in Tallahassee, also chose to return. So did senior tight end **Nick O'Leary** (right), whose blocking and pass-catching helped ignite a 2013 offense that led the country in yards per play (7.67).



The rest of the answer will be found in the Seminoles who *weren't* eligible to leave for the NFL. The headliner is Heisman Trophy-winning redshirt sophomore quarterback Jameis Winston, (who set an NCAA freshman record 4,057 passing yards and 40 TDs), but Florida State is loaded with third-year talent on defense as well. End Mario Edwards Jr., tackle Eddie Goldman, cornerbacks Ronald Darby and P.J. Williams could finish 2014 among



X-FACTOR

Last year **Mario Edwards Jr.** had 9½ tackles for a loss, including three in the BCS title game. This year the 6'3", 294-pound junior end must do more than fill a stat sheet. Florida State's defense needs leaders, and Edwards, whose father, Mario Sr., played at FSU in the 1990s, must help the seniors mentor younger players the way Tank Carradine and Timmy Jernigan did for him. "We're bringing a new tradition," Edwards says, "by bringing back the swag of the old Seminoles."



< TYLER HUNTER

SCHEDULE
ANALYSIS

The Seminoles can probably lose a game and still make the Playoff. They've beefed up their nonconference schedule with home dates against Oklahoma State (Aug. 30) and Notre Dame (Oct. 18), and annual rival Florida (Nov. 29) should be better than last year. The ACC's overall improvement will help too. Their must-win game is a Sept. 20 visit by Clemson. An FSU loss likely means no ACC Atlantic Division title and no ACC title. An SEC or Pac-12 team might make the playoff without winning its division, but that probably won't be the case in the other leagues.

the best in the nation at their positions. As could sophomore kicker Roberto Aguayo. No team has a more solid foundation for a championship run, and excellent recruiting classes in '13 and '14 have only intensified the competition for playing time.

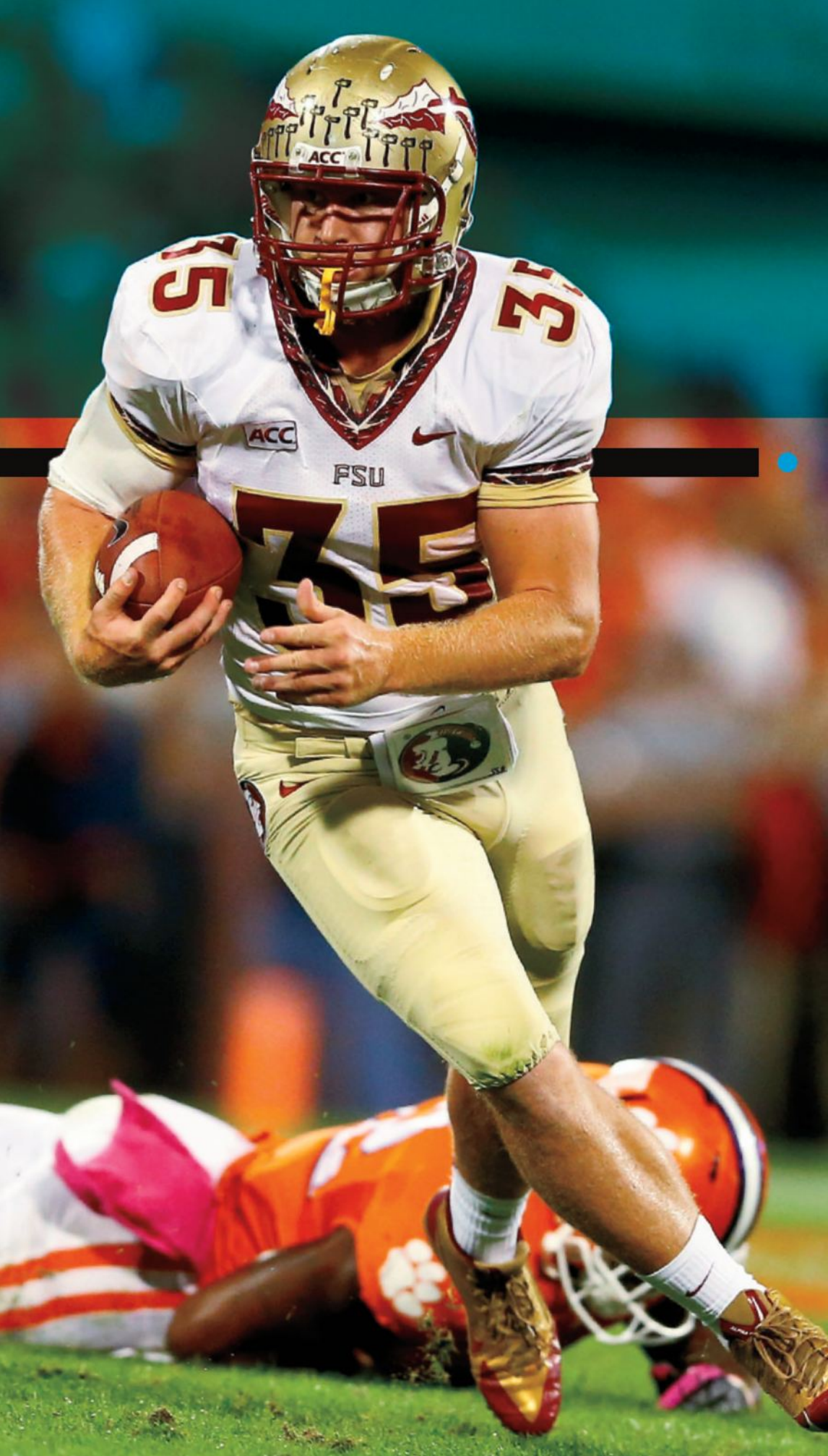
The other questions are less daunting. Who will provide leadership on the defense? Fourth-year players such as linebacker Terrance Smith and safety Tyler Hunter will have to help fill the void. And who will replace the tandem of Freeman and Wilder, who combined for 1,579 rushing yards and 22 touchdowns last year? The candidates are Karlos Williams, who averaged 8.0 yards a carry after converting from safety last September, and freshman Dalvin Cook, who bested Williams in a race during a mid-July workout.

If the Seminoles can fill the few gaps they have, Fisher will be asking the same two questions in the preseason a year from now. □

SI POWER RANKINGS / By Rotowire.com



STACY REVERE/GETTY IMAGES (HUNTER); JOE ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES (EDWARDS); STREETER LECKA/GETTY IMAGES (OLEARY)



OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

Their defense is really talented. To play there, you've got to compete because of the depth they have. You turn on the NFL draft in the past couple of years, their players just keep getting picked. It's talent after talent after talent. That's tough to overcome—but not impossible. It's a very fast, physical defense. Up front, it's a combination of speed and power. There are no weak spots. Normally you can find somebody that has something you can lean on. It's hard to find that against them.

On offense, they're very explosive. They're talented in all the skill positions, and they're athletic up front. You can't double any of their receivers because they are all really good. You have to be prepared to stop everyone. It's tough to cover them because you can't get to their quarterback. When I watched film on them last year, everybody played them soft to buy themselves time to get to Jameis Winston, who is so accurate. As you saw in the national championship game, they can take a slant route 50-something yards to set themselves up to win the game. That's why they're the national champs.

2.

ALABAMA

BY ANDY STAPLES

RELOAD TIDE!

It is a testament to Nick Saban's success that the Crimson Tide's current two-game losing streak feels like the apocalypse. Of course, Saban has happily used all that sky-is-falling angst as a motivational tool for a program that has gone 36-4 in the past three seasons. The 2013 team, he says, lost its identity, and the only way to get back on the championship path is by rededicating to the Process, Saban's blueprint for gridiron success. "Everybody's got to trust in the principles and values that helped you be successful to start with," Saban says. "No questioning anything. No judging anything. You've just got to do it." If that sounds a tad totalitarian, Saban doesn't really care. He's won four national titles—one at LSU and three in the past five years in Tuscaloosa—earning the name Nicktator along the way. The fear of more losses will only help him reestablish control.

Last season did expose some cracks in the Tide, but they were relatively minor. "Defensively we probably weren't quite as good as

we were in the past," Saban says. "We're in a little bit of a rebuilding situation." *Rebuilding* at Alabama doesn't mean what it does anywhere else. For the first time since Saban's arrival in 2007, Bama didn't have NFL-ready talent developed at one position: cornerback. That group had lost one first-rounder a year for three seasons. The attrition, plus injuries, forced the Tide to play raw athletes who weren't ready. This year they should get more out of



X-FACTOR

For **Lane Kiffin** to succeed as offensive coordinator he must be the coach who turned Tennessee quarterback-punching bag Jonathan Crompton into an NFL draft pick. So far Kiffin seems nothing like the man who grimly (and briefly) ruled at USC. "He brings that sense of frivolity," wideout Amari Cooper says. "When you're constantly competing for a championship, things can get pretty serious. Coach Kiffin is a joyful guy." That's probably a good sign for the Tide attack.



< T.J. YELDON

SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

When the Tide scheduled their opener against West Virginia in Atlanta, it seemed like the kind of game that would curry favor with the playoff selection committee. That might not be the case anymore, since the Mountaineers have faded the last two seasons. Fortunately for Alabama, the SEC West should be treacherous enough to satisfy any strength-of-schedule concerns. The Tide get Texas A&M, Mississippi State and Auburn at home, and the toughest road test is at LSU, where they needed a last-minute drive to win in 2012.

sophomore Eddie Jackson, junior Bradley Sylve and junior Cyrus Jones, while five-star freshmen Tony Brown and Marlon Humphrey offer depth. Safety Landon Collins will provide a steadying influence, and an up-front push led by 320-pound sophomore defensive end A'Shawn Robinson should make the secondary's job easier.

The other mystery is at quarterback, where Florida State transfer Jacob Coker will compete with Blake Sims for the right to lead the offense run by former USC coach Lane Kiffin. Whoever wins the job will have plenty of help. The speedy **Amari Cooper** (right) has recovered from toe and foot injuries, and fellow receiver Christian Jones and tight end O.J. Howard will also stretch defenses. Tailback T.J. Yeldon is the SEC's returning rushing leader, and 238-pound sophomore Derrick Henry could be even better. The rebuild—such as it is—might be complete by the season opener. □

SI POWER RANKINGS / By Rotowire.com





OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

They're very big on defense. Big up front. Their linebackers are those bigger bodies, which helps against the run, but they don't play in space as well because of their body types. They're meant to be stop-the-power, stop-the-counter guys. They don't do too much schematically. You know where they're going to be.

I do like their philosophy of, Hey, this is what you're going to get. It's up to you to try to beat it. They're very, very hard bodies to move. Their pass rush is not going to be bullets off the edge. We knew if it was going to be Cover Two or if it was going to be man.

They're coached very well, and their structure is very good. From talking to our players, the Bama kids did the least amount of trash-talking out of any team we played. They're just very disciplined players, and I have a lot of respect for that.

On offense they're very methodical, especially with their power run game. They try to control the game and the clock. They've got enough talent at wide receiver that if you pack the box, they're going to throw it over the top of you.

3.

OKLAHOMA

X-FACTOR

Last fall junior defensive end **Charles Tapper** made 24 tackles and totaled 5½ sacks. It was only his fourth season playing football. At 6' 4" and 281 pounds, with exceptional strength and athleticism, Tapper is an All-Big 12 talent with Pop Warner-level experience. Tapper showed glimpses of his potential by making six tackles at Oklahoma State and three tackles for loss against Kansas. With time and coaching, he could be a quarterback-wrecking force.



TREVOR KNIGHT

BY BEN GLICKSMAN

GOOD KNIGHT

Oklahoma's win over Alabama in last season's Sugar Bowl showed what this year's Sooners could be. In overwhelming the Crimson Tide 45-31, the Sooners rolled out an aggressive defense and a passer with a knack for Johnny Manziel-like improvisation. Now they need to add consistency, beginning with redshirt sophomore quarterback Trevor Knight.

Before dissecting the Tide for 348 passing yards and four touchdowns, Knight struggled. He went 11 of 28 in a 34-0 win against Louisiana-Monroe in his first career game, and he was benched following a 10-of-20 outing in a 16-7 victory over West Virginia. But his performance against Bama—which sparked dark-horse Heisman Trophy talk—and another spring and summer of practice inspired enough confidence among the Sooners' staff that former starting quarterback Blake Bell was moved to tight end for his final year.



It will be up to Knight to get the most out of a young but promising group of skill players. The top playmaker will likely be junior Sterling Shepard, a speedy 5' 10" wide receiver who will line up both in the slot and on the outside to maximize his big-play abilities. He's the only returning wideout who had more than 200 receiving yards in 2013. Redshirt sophomore running back Alex Ross, a former four-star prospect, should have a breakout year behind



SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

Though a Sept. 13 matchup with Tennessee could be tricky, Oklahoma's nonconference slate shouldn't be a challenge—or earn much strength-of-schedule credit. The team's playoff destiny will ride on a tough stretch from Oct. 4 through Nov. 8 that includes showdowns at TCU and against Texas, then home dates against Kansas State and Baylor. If the Sooners escape with no more than one loss, a spot in the bracket will be in sight. They can nail it down against Oklahoma State in the regular-season finale, which comes after a bye.

an offensive line that has four starters returning.

Oklahoma brings back nine defensive starters, led by junior end Charles Tapper and linebackers Dominique Alexander, Geneo Grissom and **Eric Striker** (right). While the Sooners have had issues slowing potent rushing attacks—Baylor and Texas each ran for 255 yards in routs of Oklahoma last fall—they have been dominant on passing downs. Coordinator Mike Stoops switched to a 3-4 alignment last season with a focus on getting after the quarterback, culminating in a seven-sack showing against the Tide. “You gotta eat your broccoli before you get your ice cream,” Tapper says of rushing the passer. “We know if we eat our broccoli and stop the run, it’s time to go have fun.”

The Sooners have question marks, but they have all the pieces to reach the playoff, particularly in a wide-open Big 12.



SUE OGROCK/AP (KNIGHT); DERRICK HINGLE/USA TODAY SPORTS (TAPPER); JOHN WILLIAMSON/AP (STRIKER)

SI POWER RANKINGS / By Rotowire.com





OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

I've watched the Oklahoma-Alabama Sugar Bowl a bunch. Trevor Knight was so good: Anytime a player has that kind of success against a team like Alabama, it changes things. I'm sure the other players now believe in him in the locker room and when he takes charge in the huddle. His confidence is going to be really high. [Receiver] Sterling Shepard obviously is skilled, but they have some big shoes to fill when you start talking about their running backs and wideouts. They were able to put up some big numbers last year, and sometimes that can hurt you because the new guys try to do too much instead of just playing within the system.

I think they can control the line of scrimmage with the kind of guys they have playing defensive tackle and noseguard, allowing the athletes behind them to run free. And they have the premier linebacker—or whatever you want to call him—in the country in Eric Striker. He has one-on-one matchups with offensive tackles, and they can't block him. If Knight plays with the confidence I think he'll have, well, they're picked to win the Big 12 for a reason.

4.

OHIO STATE

BY PETE THAMEL

CUT OFF AT THE PASS

In the January 2007 BCS title game, Florida's defensive line had five sacks and overwhelmed an Ohio State offense that gained just 82 yards. To Urban Meyer, then the Gators' coach, that dominance up front was a signature strength of the SEC, which won the next six titles. "What separated the SEC," Meyer says, "was the athleticism of the big guys."

In Columbus, that blowout is now viewed as a blueprint. As Meyer enters his third season at Ohio State, his SEC-caliber front four should bull-rush the Buckeyes into the College Football Playoff. Tackles Michael Bennett, a 6' 2", 288-pound senior, and Adolphus Washington, a 6' 4", 288-pound junior, fit new line coach Larry Johnson's preference for leaner bodies and explosive hips over sloppy gap stuffers. Bennett, the son of West Point graduates, projects as a first-round pick after racking up 7½ sacks in 2013. A healthy Washington, who struggled with groin issues last season, brings the pass-rushing skills of a

converted end; his return will leave opposing coordinators baffled about which tackle to double-team.

Defensive ends Joey Bosa (6' 5", 285 pounds) and Noah Spence (6' 3", 252) combined for 15½ sacks and 28 tackles for a loss last year, leaving Big Ten quarterbacks swiveling their heads. Bosa, a true sophomore and the son of former Dolphins first-round pick John Bosa, will need to be especially sharp the first two weeks while Spence, a junior, serves a suspension

X-FACTOR

OSU coaches see true freshman **Curtis Samuel**, a 5' 11", 190-pound RB-WR hybrid, as a game-breaker they can use creatively out of the backfield. Samuel's 4.4 speed makes him the type of player Meyer loves to isolate in space with shovel and swing passes. (Think Percy Harvin.) If the Buckeyes line up Samuel in the backfield and sophomore H-back Dontre Wilson (4.3 in the 40) in the slot, they will have the sort of speed that puts extreme pressure on defenses.



< MICHAEL BENNETT

SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

Kent State is the only nonconference breeze on the schedule. Otherwise, Ohio State opens at Navy—whose triple-option offense is always a challenge—and faces Virginia Tech and Cincinnati in the Horseshoe, a slate that should be well received by the selection committee. The trip to Michigan State on Nov. 8, a rematch of last year's Big Ten title game, will be hailed all season as the de facto conference championship. That's why coach Urban Meyer isn't thrilled that the Spartans have a bye the previous week.

for a positive drug test. But once Spence returns, the Buckeyes' defensive front could look similar to Florida's line of 2006. "They have the potential," Meyer says, "to be the best I've had."

The worries for OSU come on the offensive line, where tackle Taylor Decker is the only full-time returning starter. In theory, that means Meyer should balance his offense with more passing after running on 63.3% of the snaps last season. But even after **Braxton Miller** (right) won the Big Ten offensive player of the year award for the second time and led the league with 24 TD tosses, he still needs work identifying coverages. Meyer has promised to call fewer designed runs for Miller; if he sticks to his word, it will mean that the senior has matured as a passer. That kind of growth, plus a front four that can throttle an offense by itself, could deliver the Big Ten its third national title since 1970. □

SI POWER RANKINGS / By Rotowire.com





OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

Whether you call him a tailback or a quarterback, Braxton Miller is the best athlete in the Big Ten. He's a hard guy to get down. But he doesn't scare you as a passer. We'd bring six guys and he still couldn't find anyone to throw it to. Most of their yards are on broken plays where he runs for 40 yards. If he figured out the passing game, he would be very scary. I wouldn't want to see that.

In watching Ohio State compared with a lot of other teams in this conference, the one thing they have is speed. They were the closest thing we saw to an SEC team. Schematically, Urban Meyer and [OC] Tom Herman do as good a job as anyone in the Big Ten. They were the best team we played last year, without a doubt. They really understand defenses and how to react to them. And they have the athletes to back up the schemes.

I can't tell you if they're going to be better than Michigan State. They both present their own challenges. Michigan State wants to control the ball and keep you from getting to 21, whereas Ohio State can just outscore you.

5.

UCLA



X-FACTOR

With Anthony Barr (66 tackles, 20 for loss) and Jordan Zumwalt (91 tackles) gone to the NFL, the time is now for **Zach Whitley**, a 6' 1", 218-pound true freshman from Houston's North Shore High who was rated one of the best linebackers in his class. Coach Jim Mora doesn't mind playing rookies (18 true freshmen took snaps in 2013), and Whitley enrolled early to learn the playbook. He was impressive in spring practice and will get the chance to prove himself.



BRETT HUNDLEY

BY LINDSAY SCHNELL

GETTING GROUNDED

Finding a dominant runner not named Brett Hundley is the top item on the Bruins' to-do list. The 6' 3", 227-pound junior quarterback led UCLA on the ground last season (748 yards and 11 touchdowns), and the second-most-talked-about rusher was Myles Jack, who racked up 267 yards and seven TDs while also starting at linebacker. "I think Brett developing as a passer, and the receiving corps we've got, should help us run the ball," says coach Jim Mora. "I like when Brett takes off and runs, but I'd like to be able to just pound it at people."

Besides Jack, the top candidate is 5' 9", 196-pound senior Jordon James, who gained 6.3 yards per carry through the 2013 season's first four weeks before being sidelined with a right-ankle injury. Devin Fuller and Devin Lucien, both junior receivers, must develop into dangerous downfield targets. Bringing back an experienced offensive line should help: Five juniors and sophomores are back. Miami

transfer Malcolm Bunche (6' 7", 327 pounds), who's immediately eligible, will add depth.

Hundley, who became the first Bruin since 1960 to throw for, run for and catch a TD in one game, can't do it by himself all the time. In 2013 the Bruins had double-digit wins for just the eighth time in school history. With a preseason Heisman candidate under center, UCLA has a shot at the playoff if other playmakers emerge. □



SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

The Bruins host Oregon, USC and Stanford this season, but the first big challenge will be a nonconference battle with Texas on Sept. 13 at AT&T Stadium in Arlington—a matchup that at least looks less daunting than it did when it was scheduled in 2011. A Nov. 8 date at Washington could pose problems. After last season's 35-14 win at USC, coach Jim Mora shouted, "We own this town!" Another victory over the Trojans on Nov. 22 would confirm that.

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

It all comes down to the quarterback and can he play consistently—and everybody will say that about UCLA. If you watch any stretch where the Bruins struggled last year, it's because [Brett Hundley] was missing throws. But he's such a good player, he's going to give people fits. If opponents can force him to make accurate throws, that's what will challenge him. If you pressure him, he's going to take off, and he's such a big, strong kid, he's hard to bring down. If he figures it out and puts it all together, Wow. [Offensive coordinator Noel] Mazzone is a fabulous football coach, so they'll be fun to watch, and they've got a nice group of wideouts. Defensively they're tough, physical and violent, and they want to get after you. That hasn't really been their calling card in the past. They have some mature players in the secondary—they've had good guys there before, but now they're experienced. It will be interesting to see how they replace those linebackers they lost, but they recruited well to fill those holes immediately. Bottom line, they're one of the best teams in the conference.

MARCO JOSE SANCHEZ/AP (HUNDLEY); JESUS RAMIREZ/UCLA FOOTBALL (WHITLEY)

SI POWER RANKINGS / By Rotowire.com



6.

MICHIGAN STATE

BY PETE THAMEL

WAITING FOR GOOD O

Star junior defensive end Shilique Calhoun's futuristic face mask earned him the nickname Bane, for Batman's nemesis in *The Dark Knight Rises*. After pillaging opposing backfields for 71½ sacks, 14 tackles for a loss and three defensive touchdowns last season, his play matched his persona. "I see myself as a villain on the field," he says. The 6' 5", 256-pound Calhoun will have to break in some new partners in crime, but it's hard to doubt coordinator Pat Narduzzi, who produced the Big Ten's best defense for the third straight year. Though he lost Darqueze Dennard, the country's top defensive back, Narduzzi expects junior Trae Waynes to slide into Dennard's spot

without much drop-off.

For Michigan State to repeat as conference champs, the offense must catch up with its defense. Junior quarterback Connor Cook proved his big-game mettle in the Big Ten title game and the Rose Bowl—five TD passes and two interceptions against Ohio State and Stanford—and he'll have almost all of his top targets back, including senior receiver Tony Lippett (44 catches, 613 yards) and sophomore tight end Josiah Price (17 for 210). Bruising senior running back Jeremy Langford (1,422 yards) returns as well. The highest priority: quickly and effectively replacing three O-line starters. Because wasting all that defensive talent would be criminal. □



JEREMY LANGFORD

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

The hardest thing about playing the Spartans is that they challenge every single throw. There are no gimmies, anywhere. Their secondary does a great job in press coverage—it's their role and the team's identity. Those players own it because they do it all the time, and the coaches recruit great athletes who are physical just for that purpose. The way that they cover you man-to-man out on an island sets up the rest of their defense. It's not terribly complicated, as they really only have three or four different blitzes. The hard part is that you can't tell when the blitz is coming because they do such a good job holding the disguise until the last possible second.

The most important thing about Michigan State is that they really play hard. That's good coaching. They control the ball on offense. They throw it just enough to keep you honest. It's always a challenge to win the turnover battle with them. They are happy to punt. And when you're on offense, if you overthrow or underthrow one ball, they're going to pick it off.



SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

A Sept. 6 visit to Oregon will swing MSU's season. A win establishes the Spartans as a playoff favorite; a loss raises early questions about whether the Big Ten will be the one Power Five conference left out of the playoff. If the Spartans do stumble in Eugene, they'll need to run the table, which would mean home victories over Nebraska (Oct. 4), Michigan (Oct. 25) and Ohio State (Nov. 8) and a win against the West champ in the Big Ten title game. Would that be enough for the committee?

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X-FACTOR

Coach Markantonio values field position and ball control. That's why receiver **R.J. Shelton's** 34-yard run against Indiana last season, highlighted by a leap over a Hoosier, popped off the screen. Shelton, a sophomore who converted from running back to slot receiver, brings 4.4 speed to spice up a traditionally bland offense. Look for coordinator Dave Warner to find creative ways to get Shelton (7.3 yards per carry) touches on short passes, reverses and handoffs from the slot.



GREGORY SHAMUS/GETTY IMAGES (LANGFORD); NATI HARNIK/AP (SHELTON)

SI POWER RANKINGS / By Rotowire.com



7.

AUBURN

BY ZAC ELLIS

BALANCE OF POWER

Auburn reached the BCS title game in coach Gus Malzahn's first season in spite of its defense, which allowed 6.0 yards per play, fifth-most in the SEC. The Tigers also gave up 35 points or more to LSU, Texas A&M, Georgia and Missouri. If Malzahn's up-tempo offense hadn't been so good, Auburn would have watched the national championship from the team lounge.

Ellis Johnson, who last year became Auburn's third defensive coordinator in three years, returns for a second season, adding stability to the Tigers' scheme. Senior defensive lineman Gabe Wright will need to be a monster to account for departed defensive end Dee Ford, a first-round draft pick, and for Carl Lawson, a sophomore end who could miss the season with a left-knee injury.

Heisman Trophy finalist Tre Mason is off to the NFL, but the offense shouldn't miss a beat. Senior Nick Marshall is Malzahn's first



returning QB in his nine seasons as a college coach, and Marshall will play behind one of the country's best lines. Junior receiver Sammie Coates (21.5 yards per catch in 2013) and senior tailbacks Cameron Artis-Payne and Corey Grant (a combined 1,257 rushing yards) will be major contributors. "We focused on being more balanced," Malzahn says of the off-season. "I really feel like we accomplished that." □



X-FACTOR

Sammie Coates will get a lot of attention on the edge in Auburn's passing game, but junior wideout **D'haquille Williams** could emerge as a major receiving threat. The 6' 2" 216-pounder was a junior college All-America during his two years at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College; in 2013 he hauled in 51 balls for 733 yards. In a season when dual-threat QB Nick Marshall and the Tigers are determined to pass more often, Williams has all the makings of a star.



GABE WRIGHT



SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

While the only real out-of-conference challenge is Kansas State, few teams face a slate as daunting as the Tigers'. Starting in October they enter a hellish six-week SEC stretch that includes LSU, South Carolina, at Ole Miss, Texas A&M and at Georgia without a bye. At least Auburn has a light week against Samford before heading into an emotionally charged Iron Bowl in Tuscaloosa on Nov. 29. They'll need to win at least eight of their last nine to have a shot at the Playoff.

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

One of the things I've always thought Gus does well is, he fits his offense to the strengths of his personnel. Last year with the running back and quarterback they had, he was able to make sure he maximized the touches those two got. With the ability to run the quarterback and make the defense account for the 11th man on the field, they were pretty effective. Marshall's ability as a passer is average to above average, but he's so good as a runner that it doesn't permit teams to necessarily play man coverage. That forces them to play zone, and when you add that to Marshall's ability as a runner, it opens up larger throwing lanes. Assuming they use him the same way, I could see him being more effective as a passer.

On defense they played a lot of man coverage. They were able to generate pressure with a four-man rush and be decent against the run. Even though they lost some starters, they have guys with snaps under their belts. I can't anticipate there will be much of a drop-off there.

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8.

OREGON



X-FACTOR

At 6' 4" and 200 pounds, redshirt freshman strong safety **Tyree Robinson** is bigger, faster, taller and has a wider reach than most at his position. Certainly he takes up more space than his predecessor, 5' 10" Brian Jackson. A likely starter, Robinson will be the most physically imposing safety in Eugene since Keith Lewis (2000-03). The Ducks lost three starters from the secondary, but Robinson will be an instant fit in their often underrated D.



KEANON LOWE

BY LINDSAY SCHNELL

PLAYMAKERS WANTED

Keeping Marcus Mariota on the field is the Ducks' biggest concern in 2014. Yes, they still need a go-to receiver, and their lack of offense against Texas in the 2013 Alamo Bowl (just one offensive touchdown) is cause for concern. But when he's healthy, Mariota is one of the nation's best players and a potential No. 1 pick in the 2015 NFL draft. Before a sprained left MCL slowed him in a 26-20 loss to Stanford last November, Mariota & Co. appeared headed to the BCS title game. Still, he finished with 3,665 passing yards, 31 touchdowns and only four interceptions. (He tacked on 715 yards and nine TDs rushing for good measure.) Now the 6' 4", 215-pound junior—40 pounds heavier than when he arrived as a freshman—is a preseason Heisman favorite in a conference stacked with quarterback talent.

Oregon lost receiver Bralon Addison to a left-ACL tear in the spring, which means 5' 9" senior Keanon Lowe (18 catches



for 233 yards and three touchdowns) needs to become the top target. Junior running back Byron Marshall, the Pac-12's top returning rusher (1,038 yards and 14 TDs), and sophomore Thomas Tyner (711 yards and nine TDs) provide a terrific one-two punch.

If Mariota can find a few more reliable receivers, and the backs can deliver against defenses stacked to stop the pass, Oregon can reach the top four by December. □



SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

A Week 2 game against Michigan State in Eugene—where the Ducks are heavy favorites—will have playoff implications. For the second consecutive season Oregon misses USC and Arizona State in the Pac-12 rotation, but mark the calendar for Oct. 11, when the Ducks travel to Pasadena to take on UCLA. That comes one week after they host Arizona, which thumped them 42-16 last season. Defending league champ Stanford, winner of two straight against Oregon, visits on Nov. 1.

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OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

Obviously Marcus Mariota is the best player in the conference, and I don't think it's close. They've got some interesting holes to fill. De'Anthony Thomas had such big-play potential, and with [receiver Josh] Huff [going pro] and Bralon Addison [suffering a season-ending ACL tear] they've lost some dangerous playmakers, but they've recruited well and they always do a good job finding a way to get guys the ball in space. They don't get much credit for how good they are defensively, but they're solid schematically and they play so hard. They've got good tacklers in space too. That secondary is pretty darn good, especially with [cornerback] Ifo [Ekpre-Obomu] coming back. They've been really good there the last couple of years, and they're going to be good again in that spot. It's crazy that some fans are mad that [coach Mark] Helfrich won *only* 11 games last year. People are so jaded and so spoiled—do they have any idea how hard it is to win in college football? We'll see what happens this season, but with Mariota pulling the trigger, they are really tough.

STEVE CONNER/ICON SM (LOWE); ERIC EVANS (ROBINSON)

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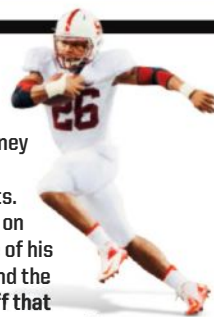
9.

STANFORD



X-FACTOR

Four backs are competing to replace Tyler Gaffney and the question is whether heralded junior **Barry J. Sanders** can showcase his genetic gifts. His explosiveness stands out, and he'll be used on everything from punt returns to screens. Some of his best runs are improves that start with hits behind the line—just like his Hall of Fame dad. "There's stuff that he sees and feels that other people don't," Stanford OC Mike Bloomgren says. "That probably started when sperm met egg."



◀ KEVIN HOGAN

BY PETE THAMEL

HOLDING THE LINE

Oversized photos of Stanford's offensive and defensive lines greet the Cardinal at their new locker room entrance. The not-so-subtle message: Stanford's four-game BCS bowl streak—and the coinciding facility upgrade—are due to trench domination.

While Stanford isn't turning pass-happy, the Cardinal will adapt as they work in four new O-line starters. The one returner is junior left tackle Andrus Peat (6' 7", 316 pounds), a future NFL cornerstone. The four other assumed starters—guard Joshua Garnett (6' 5", 325), center Graham Shuler (6' 4", 287), guard Johnny Caspers (6' 4", 297) and tackle Kyle Murphy (6' 7", 298)—arrived with Peat as part of a 2012 recruiting haul of linemen considered one of the best ever. The new Cardinal starters aren't green: All have played in extra linemen packages. Operating behind them, third-year starting quarterback Kevin Hogan (20 TDs and 10 INTs in '13) will throw to All-America return man Ty Montgomery



(10 TD catches) and field stretcher Devon Cajuste (22.9 yards per reception).

Stanford will stay true on defense, where senior end Henry Anderson (6' 6", 287) anchors an experienced line. But the stars are in the secondary; senior strong safety Jordan Richards and junior cornerback Alex Carter project as NFL players. Another sign that Stanford is evolving, while sticking to its roots. □



SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

It's a bad season to be a Stanford season-ticket holder, with the only marquee home game against USC in Week 2. The road schedule—at Washington, at Notre Dame, at Arizona State, at Oregon, at Cal and at UCLA—could be the most difficult in the country for a power-league school. No game looms larger than the Nov. 1 trip to Eugene if the Cardinal wants to repeat as Pac-12 champion.

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

In the past, Stanford had good possession receivers but no home run threats. Not anymore. Ty Montgomery can go all the way on any play—and fellow senior Devon Cajuste is even faster than him. The deep threats present opponents with the classic football conflict between supporting the run with the secondary or staying back. Their offensive line is always going to be their strength. Last year they were down in numbers at tight end, so they just converted an offensive linemen and exacerbated the problems opponents have facing their line. Their tailbacks always run north-south, as they really are a good downhill team. Kevin Hogan is a good game manager who can throw it well, but they don't rely on him to make a play, like a spread offense quarterback. They've become a tough team to prepare for because all season long you are usually dealing with the spread. Back in the day, you used to be ready to play the two-back (pro-style) run game. But now it's the opposite.

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10.

BAYLOR

BY COLIN BECHT

POINTS PLUS

There are heightened expectations in Waco after Baylor won its first Big 12 title last year, especially because senior quarterback Bryce Petty returns. Petty threw for 4,200 yards and 32 TDs in 2013 while leading Baylor to 52.4 points per game. He also racked up a team-high 14 touchdowns on the ground. Petty will have help from returning redshirt sophomore back Shock Linwood, who gained 6.9 yards per carry last fall, second in the conference. The Bears also bring back five of Petty's top six targets, a group that accounted for 75% of the team's 13 receptions. Baylor's concern lies on the offensive line, which must replace All-America guard Cyril Richardson

and showed limited depth when left tackle Spencer Drango went down with a back injury last year.

But the Bears' ability to retain their Big 12 title depends on the defense. The much-maligned unit leaped from 95th to 15th in yards allowed per play, improving from 6.0 in 2012 to 4.8 last year. Senior middle linebacker Bryce Hager is back to anchor the unit, but he is one of only four returning starters. Junior defensive ends Shawn Oakman and Jamal Palmer, who combined for seven sacks and 23.5 tackles for loss last season, should provide pressure, but Baylor's secondary will be made up almost entirely of new faces. Baylor will score points, but how many will they give up? □



BRYCE PETTY ➤

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

They've got a plan for every defensive look—two high safeties, one high safety, etc. They're a nightmare to deal with: This is a big-play offense. They pick you and pick you and then they go deep—Baylor's not shy at all about going deep on you. I guarantee that if they've got nine [wide receivers] dressed for a game, seven of them can go all the way anytime they get the ball in their hands.

You hear coaches talk about managing the offense. [Bryce Petty] runs their offense. You can tell the coaches have done a great job preparing him. He understands their offense. There's a great deal of difference between somebody who knows the offense [and somebody who] really understands what the coaches are trying to do. I don't see them changing a whole lot. I think everyone else in the league probably wishes they would change something. They're a headache. There's no doubt about it.



SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

A weak nonconference slate—SMU, Northwestern State and Buffalo—gives the Bears a chance to break in new starters but leaves no room for error. A playoff berth will likely require perfection, so Baylor will have to avoid slipups at Texas and at home against Oklahoma State and Kansas State. The Nov. 8 matchup with Oklahoma looms as a de facto Big 12 championship game. After benefiting from a home date against the Sooners in 2013, a 41-12 win, Baylor must travel to Norman this year.

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X-FACTOR

With Lache Seastrunk and Glasco Martin gone, running back **Devin Chafin** slides up to partner with Shock Linwood as the costar on Baylor's postspring depth chart. A redshirt sophomore, Chafin gained 5.8 yards per carry last season and will likely more than double his 51 carries. Chafin did his best with more work, rushing for 100 yards and two touchdowns on a season-high 11 attempts against Texas Tech. Coach Art Briles expects Chafin to top 1,000 yards this fall.



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11.

SOUTH CAROLINA

BY ANDY STAPLES

MANY HAPPY RETURNS

South Carolina lost the No. 1 pick in the NFL draft (defensive end Jadeveon Clowney) and the best quarterback in school history (Connor Shaw). So why are the Gamecocks confident that they can stretch their streak of seasons with double-digit victories to four and win the SEC East for the first time since 2010? Because they bring back almost everyone else. South Carolina had one of the youngest teams in the country last season, and those kids accounted for 78.9% of their rushing yards and 74.8% of their receiving yards. Six of their top eight tacklers return, as do four offensive line starters, including three (guard A.J. Cann and tackles Corey Robinson and Brandon Shell) with at least 22 career starts.

Replacing the star power matters, though. With no proven edge rushers, defensive coordinator Lorenzo Ward installed a 3-4 scheme to use the gap-clogging capabilities of the 6'2", 310-pound,



five-technique J.T. Surratt. On offense, fifth-year senior Dylan Thompson filled in ably when Shaw was sidelined, throwing a game-winning TD pass against Michigan in the 2013 Outback Bowl.

In each of the past three seasons South Carolina has beaten the eventual SEC East champ but failed to win the division. If the Gamecocks can claim the East, they're only one good day in Atlanta from the playoff. □

X-FACTOR

Dylan Thompson doesn't run as well as Connor Shaw did, so tailback **Mike Davis** will have even more responsibility. He outrushed every returning SEC player in 2013 except Alabama's T.J. Yeldon, gaining 1,183 yards on 203 carries with 11 TDs on the ground. The challenge for Davis will be busting through defenses that know he's coming. Shaw was a master of the zone read, and defenders knew he might keep the ball. Thompson isn't as dangerous, so D's will tilt toward Davis on those plays.



< J.T. SURRATT

SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

South Carolina might have the toughest first three games of any team in the nation—Texas A&M, East Carolina and Georgia—but all three are at Williams-Brice Stadium. While the Gamecocks' 18-game home winning streak will be at risk, if they emerge 3-0 they'll have the inside track on the SEC East championship. Two late-season road games could derail their playoff hopes; getting by Auburn on Oct. 25 won't be easy. Neither will winning at Florida on Nov. 15.

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

What did they do well on defense? They did Clowney really well. They're going to miss him tremendously. They also had [defensive tackle Kelcy] Quarles, who was really good, who left early too. They had a couple of young defensive ends who showed up pretty well on film. A lot of their success up front has really been personnel-driven rather than straight-up scheme. Their linebackers were probably the weak point of their defense; opponents could create some matchup issues with them. But [coach Steve Spurrier] has done a great job of recruiting. He's got difference-makers now. On offense, you can tell Steve has been doing this a long time. You might get him some, but he's going to get you some, too. And he knows how to fix his stuff when you do get to him. He can fix it in a hurry. As you watch the tape, you're like, All right, I'm going to attack him this way. But there's something in that arsenal that scares you from attacking him that way. And if he gets you, it's going to be six. You can't cheat on defense. You can't get exotic too often.

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PHILAN M. EBENHACK/AP (SURRATT); BILL FRANKS/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (DAVIS)

12.

GEORGIA

BY ZAC ELLIS

TRANSITION GAME

New defensive coordinator Jeremy Pruitt, who coached in the last three BCS title games, has to turn around a unit that gave up the most yards per play (5.4) of the Mark Richt era. The Bulldogs also allowed 29.0 points per game, 10th in the SEC. There was a different vibe around the D this spring, with many players talking of a culture change since Pruitt's arrival.

The secondary is a source of concern. Richt dismissed cornerback Josh Harvey-Clemons and safety Tray Matthews for behavioral issues, and cornerback Shaq Wiggins transferred. Senior corner Damian

Swann is now the leader of a backfield that must be better if Georgia is to contend for a playoff spot. The good news is that the secondary will back up the SEC's best group of linebackers, including All-SEC pick Ramik Wilson (133 tackles, four sacks) and Jordan Jenkins.

The offense has a giant question mark at quarterback, now that the SEC's alltime leading passer, Aaron Murray, is gone. But new starter Hutson Mason, a senior, knows coordinator Mike Bobo's offense. Receiver Michael Bennett (538 yards, four TDs) will be a top target, though the Dawgs will lean on tailback Todd Gurley (989 rushing yards, 10 TDs), a Heisman contender. □



RAMIK WILSON ➤

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

Hutson Mason's got some game reps under his belt, and that's an advantage. It's not like he's stepping into a role where he's playing for the first time. The depth in their backfield is phenomenal. That helps for Mason's transition, because you're not going to have to lean on his arm to win ball games. Having a strong run game can only open up throwing lanes for the quarterback—and the strength of their offense will be their running. I think our tempo helped us against their defense last year, and we were able to wear them down a little bit. They had a couple of young guys filling in reserve roles since they had some injuries. We were able to isolate those guys. But for whatever struggles they had last year on defense, they return eight starters. At linebacker they have [Ramik] Wilson, who's an All-SEC player. Their linebackers are their strength, but up front, with Sterling Bailey and Chris Mayes, they can get after you too. I've heard Jeremy Pruitt's come in and really made an impact on the overall culture. With their effort and tempo in practice, he's brought a new energy level.



SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

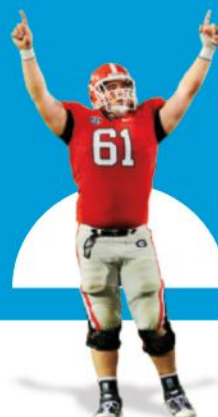
A road meeting with South Carolina in Week 2 is the key to the Bulldogs' quest for the SEC East title. If they dispose of the Gamecocks, they could well finish the season unbeaten, with a trip to Missouri on Oct. 11 and a home date with Auburn on Nov. 15 looming as the biggest potential stumbling blocks.

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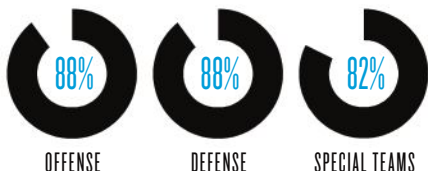
X-FACTOR

Senior center **David Andrews** has started 27 games in his career and is one of only two returning starters on the Bulldogs' offensive line. His chemistry with new starting QB Hutson Mason could make or break this offense. The 6' 2", 294-pound Andrews will have to be a leader on a line that will pave the road for Todd Gurley, Keith Marshall and the rest of Georgia's deep stable of backs. If the O-line doesn't jell quickly, the Dawgs will be in trouble.



GREG MCWILLIAMS/CON SMI (WILSON); SCOTT CUNNINGHAM/GETTY IMAGES (ANDREWS)

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13.

NOTRE DAME

X-FACTOR

Greg Bryant arrived last fall as a consensus top 50 recruit vying for a role in a wide-open backfield. He had three carries for 14 yards in three games before missing the rest of the season with severe knee tendinitis. Despite transfer rumors, the 5' 10", 205-pound Bryant remained on the roster and had a team-best 95 yards rushing in the spring game, including one 51-yard burst. He offers an explosive complement to Tarean Folston and Cam McDaniel.



◀ EVERETT GOLSON

BY BRIAN HAMILTON

GAME-CHANGER

If Notre Dame earns a playoff berth, Everett Golson will have a say in it. But it's *what* the quarterback says that will be crucial. The 6-foot senior endured his seasonlong suspension for cheating on a test in part by honing his football IQ with quarterback guru George Whitfield last year, and he is prepared to embrace the intricacies of coach Brian Kelly's offense instead of running a remedial version of it, as he did in 2012. "I can go in the room Sunday after a game, watch some film and have something valuable to bring to the table," Golson says.

He'll first have to fend off 6-foot sophomore Malik Zaire in what Kelly insists isn't "artificial competition." Expect the cannon-armed Golson to start and to far surpass his 2012 numbers (58.8% completion percentage and 12 TDs).

Returning defensive players accounted for just three sacks in 2013, and the search is on for playmakers after five front-seven starters departed. That quest



begins with 6' 2" sophomore linebacker Jaylon Smith, who weighs a mere 230 pounds and has just 3.1% body fat. He's "a ridiculous freak," according to junior defensive lineman Sheldon Day. A more assertive approach from new coordinator Brian VanGorder aims to be very disruptive. "We're going to dictate the terms," Smith says. "We're not going to wait on you to mess up. We're going to enforce that." □

SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

The lineup is typically ambitious but more backloaded than usual for the Irish. The first few games seem manageable, though Week 1 opponent Rice won 10 games in 2013 and Michigan visits in Week 2 for the last installment of that rivalry for at least six years. October features three Top 25 teams: Stanford and North Carolina at home, followed by a trip to Florida State. Road games at Arizona State and USC in November won't give the Irish any late-season breathing room.

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

You've got a quarterback who has to kick some rust off, you've got a head coach calling plays again who has to kick some rust off, and you've got a new system on defense. Notre Dame has as many unknowns as anybody in the country. The formations and the style of the [offense] are going to be the same. The [dual-threat] dimension of their quarterbacks (Everett Golson and Malik Zaire) makes it different. You have to go back and look at when Brian [Kelly] called plays [in 2012], what were his tendencies? They have receivers with some size. They're going to have a line that's big and gets in the way. There's a chance the ball can get thrown to a big [receiver] easily. They're still haunted by the ghost of Manti Te'o, waiting for another great linebacker to step up. It's just a matter of when they'll become household names. [Defensively] they'll be a combination of [what] Michigan State and Iowa [run], but also what [defensive coordinator Brian VanGorder] tried to do when he was at Auburn—a fanatical 4-3 defense [with a lot of movement and blitzing].

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14.

LSU

BY BEN GLICKSMAN

GROWTH SPURTS

Saying LSU's roster is young is like calling *Breaking Bad* intense or Kanye West outspoken. The Tigers have relied on freshmen and sophomores in each of the past few seasons, and the pattern will continue since seven underclassmen entered the 2014 draft.

The latest recruiting class features dual-threat passer Brandon Harris, rangy wideout Malachi Dupre and, most notably, running back Leonard Fournette, whom coach Les Miles, at SEC media days, compared with Michael Jordan. LSU needs more than just strong performances from its newest arrivals, though. The defensive players who started to break out in 2013 have to emerge as

stars. Linebacker Kwon Alexander (65 tackles) will be asked to switch from the Sam to the Will spot. Cornerback Tre'Davious White (55 tackles, two interceptions) will look to follow in the footsteps of NFL standouts and former Tigers Patrick Peterson and Morris Claiborne. Coordinator John Chavis's unit can contain spread offenses better than any other program in the nation; that's crucial in a division with Auburn, Mississippi State and Ole Miss.

LSU is in a familiar position: heavy on potential, light on experience. To get a berth in the College Football Playoff, it has to grow up fast. □



KWON ALEXANDER

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

I know they lost a bunch of guys, but in my mind they're still LSU. They're gonna be made to stop the run. We've got to figure out a way to stop Kwon Alexander. That isn't easy, especially with those big guys they got up front. I won't say we're gonna block him all the time, but we have to at least try to get in his way and give our backs a chance to make something happen. Tre'Davious White and Rashard Robinson are superaggressive, but it got them in trouble sometimes. They are long corners who can run and be physical. This year I expect them to be a tough tandem to go against. Most of those kids they got can come in and play now. They won't have a big drop-off in talent. They might be younger, and the lack of experience will come into play. But as the season goes on, I'm sure they'll get better and better. They'll be the same old LSU team that hits you in the mouth and gets after you pretty good.



SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

LSU's playoff hopes could be dashed as early as Week 1, in a neutral-site opener (in Houston) against star tailback Melvin Gordon and Wisconsin. And if October trips to Auburn and Florida don't expose the youthful Tigers, they still have to survive this brutal four-game stretch to close out the season: Ole Miss, Alabama, at Arkansas and at Texas A&M.

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X-FACTOR

Will **Leonard Fournette**, a 6' 1", 225-pound running back from New Orleans, become the first true freshman to hoist the Heisman Trophy? He'll split carries with seniors Terrence Magee and Kenny Hilliard at first, but expect Fournette's talent to shine. He rushed for 7,619 yards at St. Augustine High, and LSU assistant Frank Wilson says, "The only [player] you could even put in the same conversation with him would be Marshall [Faulk]."



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15.

WISCONSIN

X-FACTOR

The 6' 2", 268-pound freshman **Chikwe Obasih** rose up the depth chart at defensive end this spring and should start on a defense looking for speed. If the undersized Obasih delivers outsized results on the pass rush—or simply setting the edge—the Badgers won't get pushed around. That will allow an experienced secondary to jump throws made under pressure and improve on the nine picks they snared in '13.



MELVIN GORDON

BY BRIAN HAMILTON

RUNNING TALLY

Melvin Gordon watched the Heisman Trophy ceremony last year and envisioned having his own front-row seat. To reach that perch, he's set his sights on a big number—2,000 yards. "It's definitely a goal I want to reach," Gordon says. The entire Badgers roster should share the desire. A Heisman-worthy campaign from the 6' 1", 213-pound junior would indicate the team has found the answers needed to push for a playoff berth.

Gordon's appearance in New York City will mean redshirt junior quarterback Joel Stave has successfully returned from a right-shoulder injury suffered in the Capital One Bowl last January and kept opponents from loading up against the run by bettering his 2013 performance when he became only the third QB in school history to complete more than 200 passes (208 for 2,494 yards and 22 touchdowns). It will also mean viable receiving options have emerged besides junior wideout Jordan Fredrick, who's the



Badgers' leading returning pass catcher after pulling down all of 10 balls last year. And it will mean Wisconsin has controlled the clock, keeping a defense that lost five starters off the field.

Gordon ran for 1,609 yards last year, and if his fellow Badgers can provide balance, he should do better this season. If it all coalesces, Wisconsin will have a shot at sneaking into the Playoff. □

SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

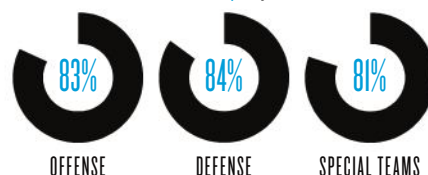
Big Ten expansion and realignment shoved Ohio State and Penn State out of the Badgers' division and brought in Nebraska and Iowa. The result is a series of games that are winnable but won't do much to impress the playoff committee. If it beats LSU in a taxing Week 1 showdown in Houston, Wisconsin might cruise until November matchups with the Cornhuskers (at home) and at Iowa. "We try to make a statement when we play anybody," senior noseguard Warren Herring says. "LSU is no different."

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

I don't know of a program in the last 20 years that has won as many games as they have without a quarterback that anyone has heard of. They have guys that just manage the game, to use a cliché. They're going to find the three to five throws that [Joel Stave] can make and stick with those. They'll say, Hey, you know what, he shoots a 12-foot jump shot really well. Let's not make him shoot 18-footers. They need just enough of a threat at receiver to loosen up the defense. But they've made a living on the ground. When they break the huddle, everyone knows what they're going to have up front with those five big dudes and the tight end. You think you have enough guys in there to stop the run, and they still run it. You leave a game with Wisconsin after getting your face kicked in and go, Who were those guys?

Defensively, their 3-4 scheme presents some problems. They're really good at it. It's not too flashy, but they never make a bunch of mistakes.

SI POWER RANKINGS / By Rotowire.com



MICHAEL HICKEY/GETTY IMAGES (GORDON); COURTESY OF BRIAN MASON/WISCONSIN ATHLETICS (OBASIH)

16.

CLEMSON

BY MARTIN RICKMAN

NEW NAMES

With signal-caller Tajh Boyd and receivers Sammy Watkins and Martavis Bryant off to the NFL, the Tigers will have to amp up their defense to reach double-digit wins for the fourth consecutive season.

The good news is that consensus All-America defensive end Vic Beasley chose to return for his senior year. The 6'2", 235-pound Beasley had 23 tackles for loss a year ago and needs eight sacks to break the Clemson career mark of 28. He's joined by returning stars such as senior linebacker Stephone Anthony (86 tackles) and senior tackle Grady Jarrett (59 tackles). "Maybe some of the names everybody's heard are more on the defensive side now instead of on

the offensive side," Clemson coach Dabo Swinney said, "and maybe that's O.K."

New starting quarterback Cole Stoudt (415 yards, five touchdowns in 2013) waited three years for his chance. Swinney raved about the senior all off-season, especially about his approach in practice and his size (6'4", 210 pounds). While the Clemson offense is built to score points no matter who's under center, Stoudt's familiarity with coordinator Chad Morris's system should make his transition smoother. If Stoudt falters, DeShaun Watson, the No. 1 dual-threat quarterback in 2014 according to Rivals.com, is ready after enrolling in January. □



VIC BEASLEY ➤

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

From an offensive standpoint it will be a challenge to replace the production they got from the quarterback and wide receiver positions. However, offensive coordinator Chad Morris is back, as are all the significant assistant coaches. They'll maintain continuity with what they're doing. And Dabo Swinney has recruited extremely well over the last three years, so they have talent.

The tempo they play is very fast. They put a lot of pressure on your defense at the line of scrimmage, and they do a good job of checking to the right play at the line. That's because they understand exactly what they're trying to accomplish on each and every play, which allows them to execute successfully. They love to get the ball in the hands of their wide receivers and skill players in space and typically they have depth at those spots. That helps a lot. Their weakness has been the offensive line, but in the last couple of years that unit has improved tremendously.



SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

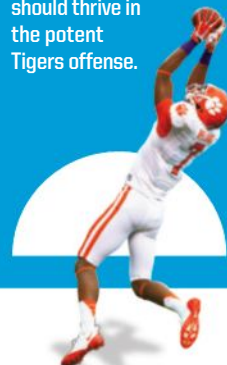
It won't take long to figure out whether the Tigers are an elite team: They face Georgia in Athens in Week 1 and play at Florida State in their third game, on Sept. 20. Home games against North Carolina (Sept. 27) and Louisville (Oct. 11) highlight the ACC schedule before Clemson squares off with cross-state rival South Carolina in the last week of the season. The Tigers have lost five straight to their neighbors from the SEC by a combined score of 155-71.

XXXXXXXXXXXX



X-FACTOR

Somebody is going to have to become the go-to playmaker the Tigers lost in Sammy Watkins, the No. 4 pick in the NFL draft. Enter **Mike Williams**, a former four-star recruit out of Vance, S.C. The 6'3", 205-pound Williams had 316 receiving yards and three touchdowns in limited action last year. Dabo Swinney says Williams compares favorably with former Clemson WR DeAndre Hopkins, of the Texans, and the sophomore should thrive in the potent Tigers offense.



SI POWER RANKINGS / By Rotowire.com



17.

USC



BY LINDSAY SCHNELL

JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENTS

Not all Trojans boosters were happy with the hiring of former Pete Carroll assistant Steve Sarkisian, but the first-year USC coach inherits a talent-rich roster, which is always a good starting point. Quarterback Cody Kessler, receiver Nelson Agholor and tailback Javorius Allen, all juniors, are back and should play well in Sarkisian's up-tempo, no-huddle style.

The 6' 1", 210-pound Kessler struggled with consistency last season. He started all 14 games, completing 236 of 361 passes (65.4%) for 2,968 yards and 20 touchdowns, with seven interceptions. But Sarkisian likes that Kessler saved his best for last (22 of 30 for 345 yards and four TDs in a 45-20 Las Vegas Bowl rout of Fresno State) and says that Kessler reminds him of former Trojans standout Mark Sanchez. The 6' 1" Agholor (56 catches, 918 yards) has the unenviable task of trying to replace All-America Marqise Lee. Allen can be a

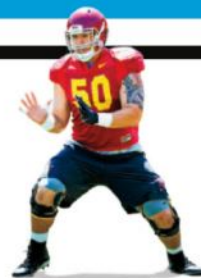
major playmaker out of the backfield; last season four of his touchdowns came on runs of 43 yards or more.

Junior defensive end Leonard Williams anchors one of the best lines in the country, but USC will be learning its third scheme in three seasons. The secondary has question marks, and don't be surprised if true freshman Adoree' Jackson gets reps at corner—and at receiver. □



X-FACTOR

A true freshman, **Toa Lobendahn** joins an offensive line that must replace three important contributors and reintegrate seven players who were out with injuries last season. The line was banged up much of the spring, and multiple starters did not participate in drills. A 6' 3" 280-pounder, Lobendahn graduated from La Habra (Calif.) High early and enrolled at USC in the spring. He'll potentially start at guard.



CODY KESSLER



SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

USC opens against Fresno State, which won 11 games last year and is favored to be the Mountain West champion for the third consecutive season. A visit to Stanford on Sept. 6 will be another tough test. Fortunately for the Trojans, they avoid Pac-12 front-runner Oregon this year, as well as Washington, coach Steve Sarkisian's former employer. Nine of the 12 teams on USC's schedule played in a bowl last season, with four of those teams winning 10 or more games.

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

I think [new coach Steve Sarkisian] will do a good job. He's put a really good staff together, and he coaches the quarterback position well. Fans and media are so quick to jump on a freshman or sophomore, but [quarterback Cody] Kessler was a baby playing the hardest position in the world [last year]. He grew into that spot nicely, and he was playing well at the end of the season. I think that kid is going to be so good; remember how everyone drooled over him coming out of high school? He'll get back to that.

It's hard to feel sorry for them with the sanctions and scholarship limits because you really play only 50, 55 guys a game—and they still have the best personnel in the conference. They're playing with five-stars at every spot. Every kid on their roster was recruited by almost every other school in their conference. Hell, even their second team was recruited by everyone else.

SI POWER RANKINGS / By RotoWire.com



STEPHEN DUNN/GETTY IMAGES (KESSLER); JOHN E. MCGILLEN/USC ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT (LOBENDAHN)

18.

OLE MISS

BY ZAC ELLIS

ENTERING THE RED ZONE

Ole Miss had one of the SEC's best attacks at times last season, averaging 6.0 yards per play and a league-leading 78.3 plays per game, but execution was often a problem. The Rebels ended the year next to last in the conference in red zone efficiency (73.9%). That inability to finish kept Ole Miss from contending in the SEC West last season.

Senior Bo Wallace holds the keys to coach Hugh Freeze's up-tempo offense. No SEC quarterback has started more games than Wallace, who ranks second in school history in passing yards (6,340). The 6'4" senior played through an injured right (throwing) shoulder

last year but is now healthy, and he worked on his throwing technique during the off-season. Sophomore receiver Laquon Treadwell and sophomore tight end Evan Engram should give Wallace plenty to work with through the air, while tailbacks I'Tavious Mathers and Jaylen Walton, who combined for almost 1,100 rushing yards last year, will man the backfield.

Nine starters are back on defense, including 6'2" senior safety Cody Prewitt, a first-team All-America last fall. This will be the best team Freeze has had in his three years in Oxford, but even a drastic improvement in scoring efficiency won't be enough to vault the Rebels to the top of the stacked SEC West. □



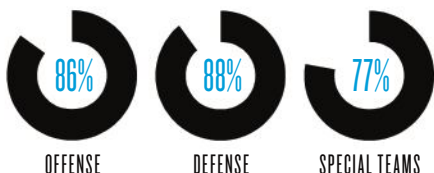
ROBERT NKEMDICHE

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

Last year they had wide receivers who were playmakers, like [Donte] Moncrief and Laquon Treadwell. In the passing game they were able to make explosive plays to get to the red zone. They could win those one-on-one battles. The quarterback was a gunslinger. It was feast or famine—Bo Wallace would turn the ball over a lot, but he also made a lot of plays. If he limits the turnovers, he could have a scary season. [He's] the most experienced quarterback returning in our league, going on his third season in Hugh Freeze's system. You can't ever underrate that. On defense some of those guys who were young last year have the talent to be elite players in the SEC. From linebacker [Tony] Conner and their safeties to the defensive lineman [Robert] Nkemdiche, and a couple of others, I think they have a chance to have one of the top defenses in the league.

SI POWER RANKINGS

By Rotowire.com



SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

The Rebels were lucky to get Alabama, Auburn and Mississippi State at home while also landing Tennessee as their rotating SEC East opponent. Road matchups at Texas A&M (Oct. 11) and LSU (Oct. 25) are obvious roadblocks, but don't overlook the team's intriguing neutral-site opener against Boise State in Atlanta.

× × × × × × × × × × × ×



X-FACTOR

C.J. Johnson, a 6'2", 225-pound defensive end, had 55 tackles and 6½ sacks as a sophomore in 2012, but he played only four games last season before having surgery on his right ankle. The Rebels missed him: As a team they had just 20 sacks (11th in the SEC) and featured a mediocre pass rush. The Ole Miss defensive line has two proven players in sophomore tackle Robert Nkemdiche and junior nosetackle Woodrow Hamilton, and now that Johnson is healthy, he'll slide back into the starting lineup and give the D the spark it needs.



19.

ARIZONA STATE

BY THAYER EVANS

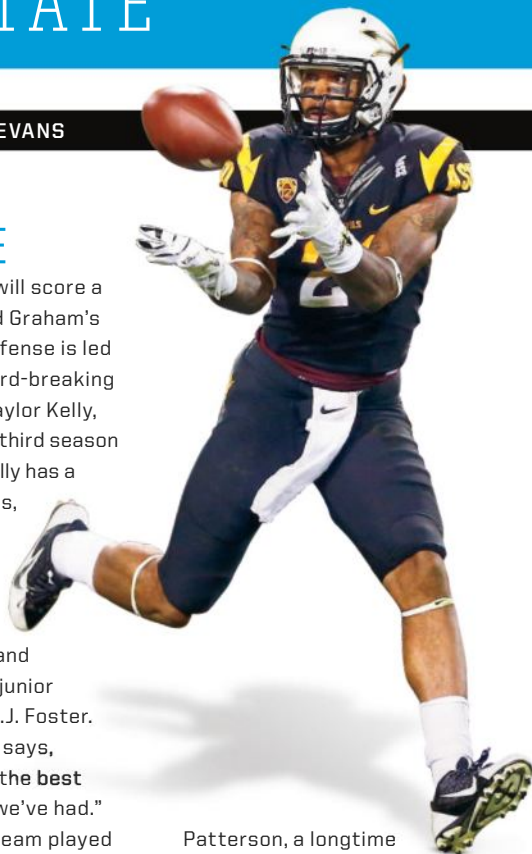
SCORING DRIVE

Arizona State will score a lot. Coach Todd Graham's high-octane offense is led by school-record-breaking quarterback Taylor Kelly, who enters his third season as a starter. Kelly has a slew of weapons, including NFL-ready redshirt junior wide receiver Jaelen Strong and do-everything junior running back D.J. Foster. "This," Graham says, "is going to be the best football team we've had."

Last year's team played in the Pac-12 title game, but Graham needs every point the offense can muster. That's because the defense surrendered at least 37 points in each of the Sun Devils' four losses, and that unit lost nine starters. Graham believes he can plug new starters into his aggressive, blitz-heavy scheme to once again be among the nation's best in forced turnovers. To help he brought in defensive coordinator Keith

Patterson, a longtime friend and former assistant at Tulsa and Pittsburgh. Graham will still call the coverages, but Patterson is now in charge of the fronts and meetings.

Graham and Patterson will run special teams too, and they hope improved play—the unit ranked among the nation's worst in net punting and failed to produce a kick-return touchdown last season—can offset any defensive lapses. □



X-FACTOR

Junior cornerback **Kweishi Brown** is a ball-hawking 6-foot, 198-pound junior college All-America who is expected to start. Coach Todd Graham raves about Brown's size, strength and speed. Brown transferred from Grossmont College in El Cajon, Calif., where in two seasons he had 11 interceptions. He's also a dynamic punt and kick returner, which addresses another area of need.



◀ JAELEN STRONG

SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

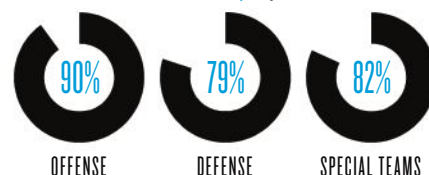
The Gauntlet. That's what Graham calls the most crucial stretch of his team's daunting schedule. Beginning in late September, the Sun Devils have four consecutive conference games, against UCLA, at USC, against Stanford and at Washington. At least two of those four opponents should be in the top 10. If ASU can make it through unscathed, they'll not only be contenders in the Pac-12 but also for the Playoff.

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

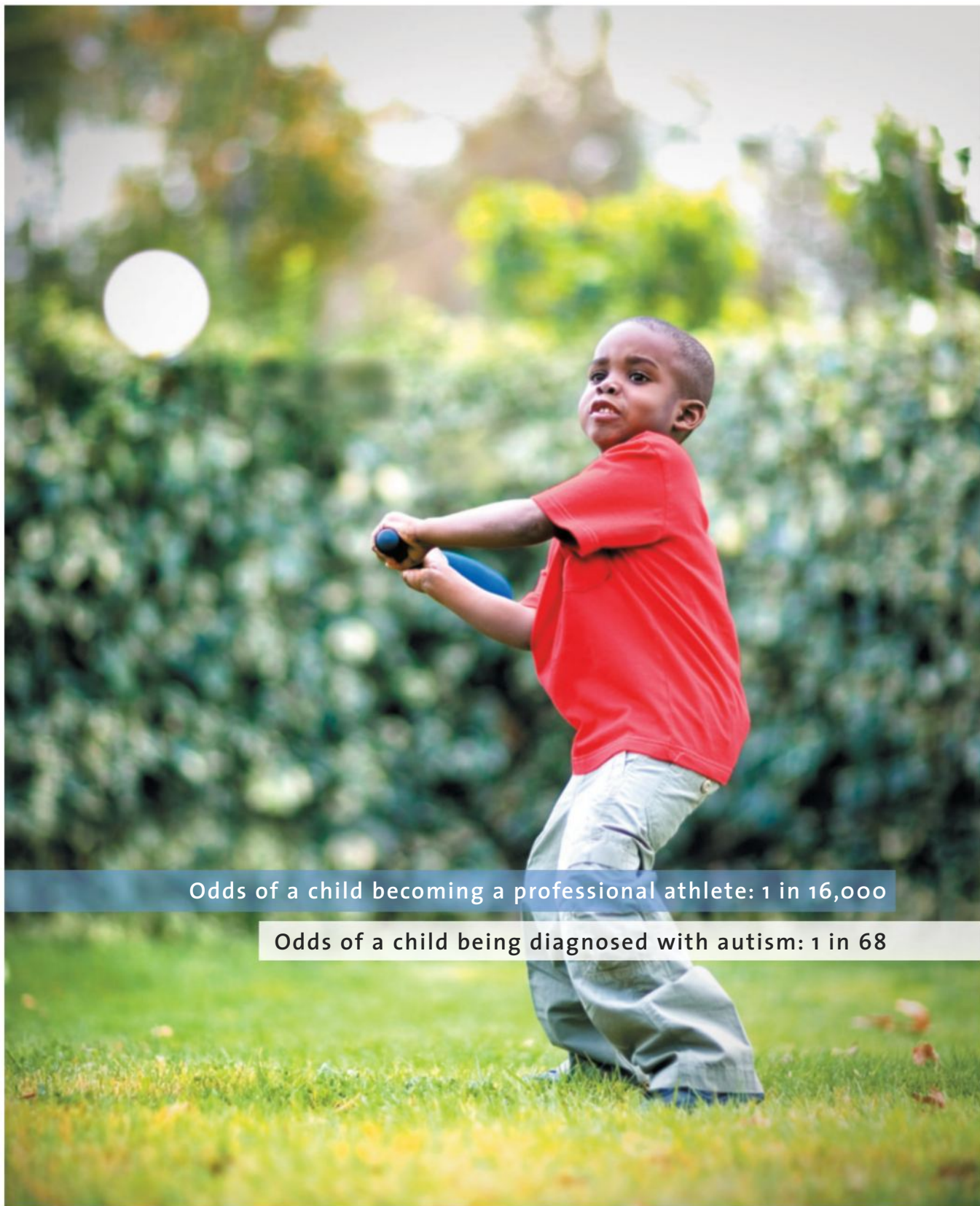
They've got most of their offense back, but the key guy is Taylor Kelly. He's so efficient and smart with the ball. There are so many good quarterbacks in the Pac-12 that folks don't realize how good he is, especially as an athlete. He's not just an accurate passer, but he can also run. They're good up front, and Jaelen Strong is one of the best returning receivers in the country. He's first-round-pick good. This is the third year in offensive coordinator Mike Norvell's system, so they'll be even more efficient.

Revamping their defense is going to be the big make or break. They have some returners who played a little bit, but will they have the same production that departed stars Will Sutton and Carl Bradford did? When you have an experienced defense like they've had, you can get away with a couple of bad possessions or a turnover because your defense can bail you out. That may not be the case anymore.

SI POWER RANKINGS / By RotoWire.com



MARK J. REHLAS/USA TODAY SPORTS (STRONG); NATHAN PRICE/EASTCOUNTYSPORTS.COM (BROWN)



Odds of a child becoming a professional athlete: 1 in 16,000

Odds of a child being diagnosed with autism: 1 in 68

Some signs to look for:

No big smiles or other joyful expressions by 6 months.

No babbling by 12 months.

No words by 16 months.



To learn more of the signs of autism, visit autismspeaks.org



AUTISM SPEAKS®
It's time to listen.

20.

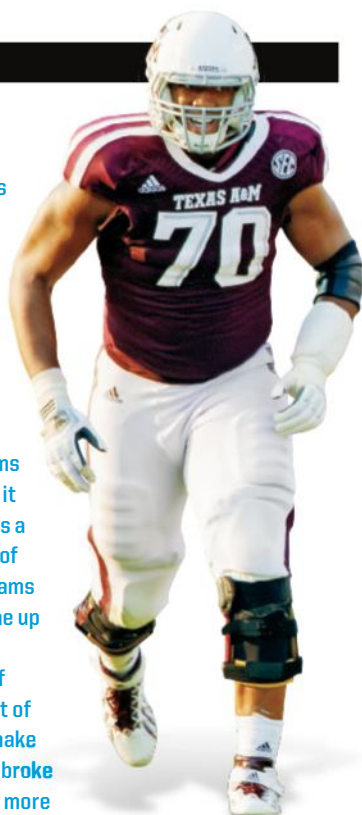
TEXAS A&M

BY ANDY STAPLES

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

Their best defense last year was Johnny Manziel—they would score so many points, the defense kind of fed off the offense. If they got up two touchdowns, they could pin their ears back and take some risks. When they were able to do that, it worked well. When they weren't able to, when teams matched them score for score, it became a problem. They gave us a lot of movement up front, a lot of stunts, but physical running teams are their kryptonite. You can line up and pound their butts.

Manziel was the architect of the offense. They didn't do a lot of complicated things; he could make so much happen after the play broke down. Without him they'll have more difficulty. They did have a good run game, and they always have a really good offensive line. [Cedric] Ogbuehi looks like the next great one. They'll rely more on the fundamentals, but they've got the talent to do that.



^ CEDRIC OGBUEHI

21.

KANSAS STATE

BY BRIAN HAMILTON

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

They'll be formidable because they're well-coached. The line tightens or widens splits based on how they run or where they run. Our defense tried to study film and figure it out, and we still couldn't stop them. [Quarterback] Jake Waters has to prove that he can stand in the pocket and convert a third-down pass when everyone in the ballpark knows he's going to throw it. You have to decide whether to let [receiver Tyler Lockett] get the ball or if you're going to find a way to bracket him.

Their defense was very sound. You look at them on film and say, 'They don't do a lot.' But, boy, they tackle, and they blitz at the right time. Ryan Mueller, the end, is the hardest-playing guy I've seen on film in a long time. His motor is on Red Bull. In the secondary they're a big zone team, so they need to be formidable up front but they only have four of their front seven coming back.



^ RYAN MUELLER

SI POWER
RANKINGS

By Rotowire.com



OFFENSE



DEFENSE



SPECIAL TEAMS

SI POWER
RANKINGS

By Rotowire.com



OFFENSE



DEFENSE



SPECIAL TEAMS



IWantToBeRecycled.org



KEEP AMERICA
BEAUTIFUL



*“I want
to be
a bench.
Recycle me.”*

22.

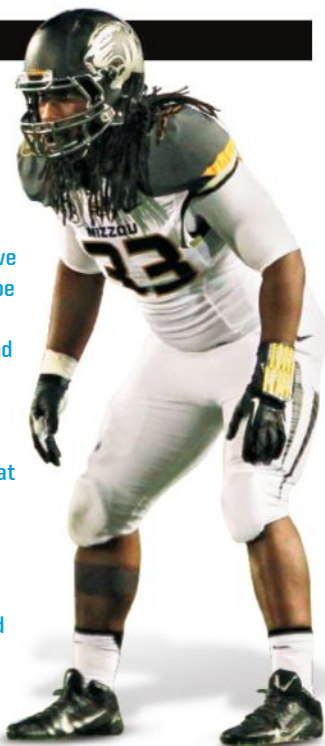
MISSOURI

BY MARTIN RICKMAN

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

You know their players are going to be in the right spots and they're going to believe in what they're doing. It's one thing to have good players, and it's another to be coached really well. When you put those two things together, you end up with a team that makes it to the SEC championship game. And [coach Gary Pinkel] recruits well, so I don't expect any drop-off. That program is built the right way.

They have the ability to rush the passer, and they do a good job of rotating those guys up front, finding your man-to-man blocks and continuously putting heat on the quarterback. Markus Golden will be their breakout guy this year. They don't have to do it a lot with blitzing; their front four is good enough. When teams can do that, they can commit seven guys to coverage, and that's harder to prepare for than a team that will blitz a lot. They score a ton of points and put great pressure on you to score as well.



MARKUS GOLDEN

23.

OREGON STATE

BY LINDSAY SCHNELL

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

You have to limit their big plays. You don't want to let [senior quarterback Sean] Mannion get settled in the pocket; moving around is not his strength, so you want to force him into that, and hopefully he'll be inaccurate and turn the ball over. There's no question that with [receiver Brandin] Cooks gone, they have a lot more to prove. I think people will play more press-man coverage and go after Mannion, at least until one of their receivers demands a little more attention.

If you can make them one-dimensional, like they were last year, it's really hard for them. I don't know that they have the type of running backs that they used to. From an offensive standpoint, attack their run defense and see if the front holds up. Their safeties are pretty aggressive, but you can attack their corners a little bit, and if you make them stop the run first, then you can hit them over the top with play-action.



SEAN MANNION

SI POWER RANKINGS

By Rotowire.com

87%

OFFENSE

85%

DEFENSE

83%

SPECIAL TEAMS

SI POWER RANKINGS

By Rotowire.com

85%

OFFENSE

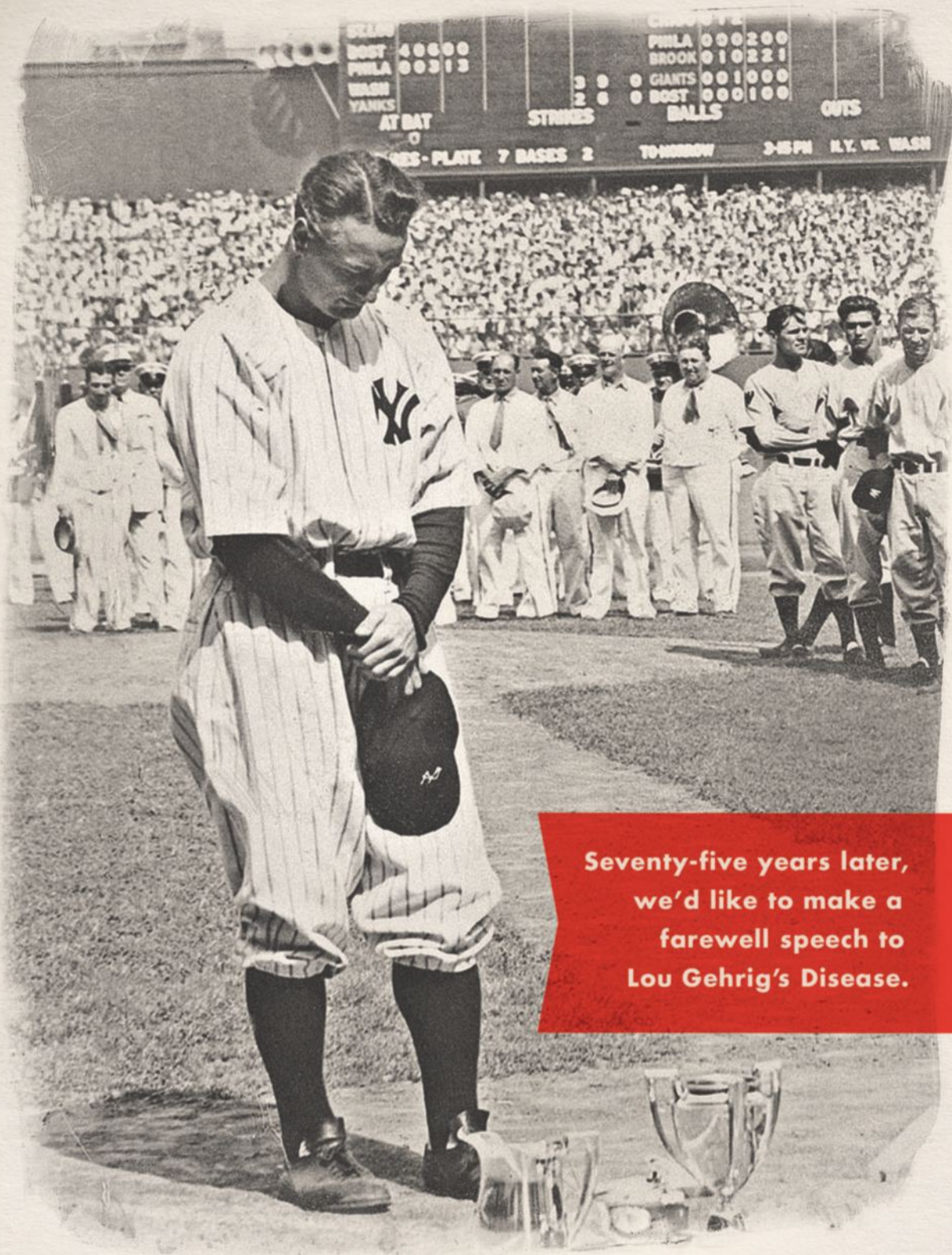
75%

DEFENSE

87%

SPECIAL TEAMS

PAT LOVELL/CSM/LANDOV (GOLDEN); JONATHAN FERREY/GETTY IMAGES (MANNION)



Seventy-five years later,
we'd like to make a
farewell speech to
Lou Gehrig's Disease.

Seventy-five years ago, Lou Gehrig delivered his famous farewell speech to baseball. While there is still no cure for ALS, the cruel disease that took his life, great advances are being made every day. Find out how you can help at ALSA.org/75.

ALS
ASSOCIATION

24.

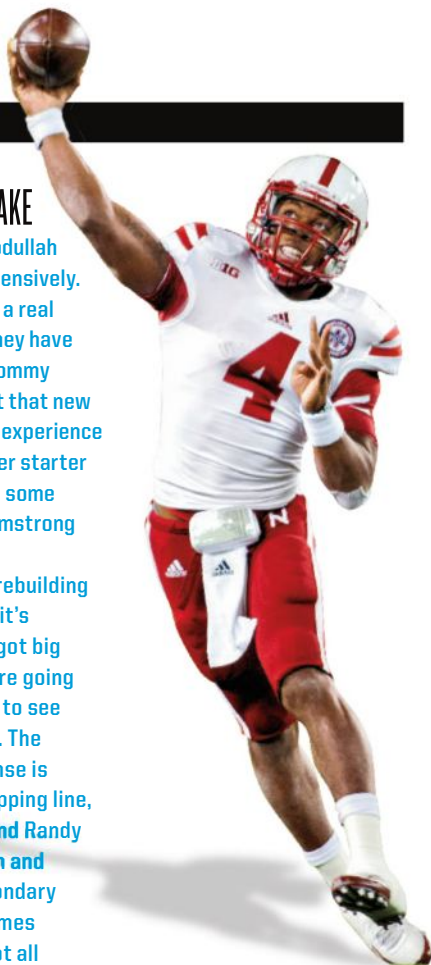
NEBRASKA

BY THAYER EVANS

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

Running back Ameer Abdullah is obviously the guy offensively. He's as good as it gets, a real freak show. They say they have a new quarterback in Tommy Armstrong, but he's not that new because he got a lot of experience last season when former starter Taylor Martinez missed some games with injuries. Armstrong is a talented kid.

They're working on rebuilding the offensive line, but it's Nebraska and they've got big Midwestern kids they're going use to fill in. I'm eager to see how well that line jells. The strength of their defense is their physical, run-stopping line, especially defensive end Randy Gregory. He's a phenom and plays like it. Their secondary has talent, but sometimes it looks as if they're not all necessarily on the same page. If they get organized, they can make drastic improvement.



TOMMY ARMSTRONG

25.

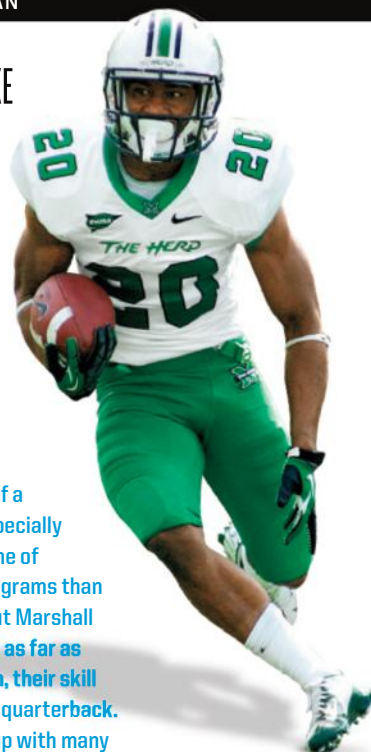
MARSHALL

BY MARTIN RICKMAN

OPPOSING COACH'S TAKE

They crank out plays. You'd better have your guys ready, and as a defensive coordinator you certainly can't debate what you're going to call. You need to have a plan, get the call in to your players and have them ready to line up. It's easier said than done.

We watch a lot of film of a lot of different teams, especially in the off-season, and some of them are bigger-name programs than Marshall. But shoot, I'd put Marshall up against most any team as far as their offensive production, their skill people and certainly their quarterback. You probably can't come up with many guys in the country that you'd trade [Rakeem] Cato for, and I'm sure [coach] Doc [Holliday] wouldn't trade him for anybody. Steward Butler can run it, too. They definitely should be up there with the elite offenses in the country.



STEWART BUTLER

SI POWER RANKINGS

By Rotowire.com

83%

OFFENSE

88%

DEFENSE

82%

SPECIAL TEAMS

SI POWER RANKINGS

By Rotowire.com

84%

OFFENSE

79%

DEFENSE

80%

SPECIAL TEAMS

NFL Concussion Settlement

All Valid Claims of Retired NFL Football Players to be Paid in Full for 65 Years
Monetary Awards, Baseline Medical Exams and Other Benefits Provided



Who is included in the Settlement?

The NFL and NFL Properties have agreed to a class action Settlement with retired players who sued, accusing them of failing to warn of and hiding the dangers of brain injury associated with playing football. The Settlement does not establish any wrongdoing on the part of the NFL or NFL Properties.

The Settlement Class generally includes all retired players of the NFL, AFL, World League of American Football, NFL Europe League and NFL Europa League. The Settlement Class includes immediate family members of retired players and legal representatives of incapacitated, incompetent or deceased players.

What does the Settlement provide?

The Settlement provides money for three benefits:

- Baseline medical exams to determine if retired players suffer from neurocognitive impairment and are entitled to additional testing and/or treatment (\$75 million),
- Monetary awards for diagnoses of ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease), Alzheimer's Disease, Parkinson's Disease, Dementia and certain cases of chronic traumatic encephalopathy or CTE (a neuropathological finding) diagnosed after death. The maximum monetary awards range from \$1.5 million to \$5 million depending on the diagnosis. All valid claims will be paid in full for 65 years; and
- Education programs and initiatives related to football safety (\$10 million).

How can I get benefits?

You will need to register for benefits after the final approval of the Settlement. You may provide your contact information now at the website or phone number below to ensure that you receive additional notice about the registration process.

Retired players do not have to prove that their injuries were caused by playing NFL football to get money from the Settlement.

What are my rights?

You do not need to do anything to be included in the Settlement Class. All Settlement Class members will be bound by the Settlement and give up the right to sue the NFL individually. If you want to keep your right to sue the NFL, you must exclude yourself from the Class by **October 14, 2014**. If you exclude yourself, you will not receive any benefits under the Settlement. If you stay in the Class, you may object to the Settlement by **October 14, 2014**.

The Court will hold a hearing on **November 19, 2014** to consider whether to approve the Settlement. You do not have to attend. However, you and/or your own lawyer may attend and request to speak at the hearing at your own expense. At a later date, the attorneys will ask the Court for an award of attorneys' fees and reasonable costs. The NFL and NFL Properties have agreed not to oppose or object to the request if the request does not exceed \$112.5 million. The money would be paid by the NFL and NFL Properties in addition to the payments described above.

Please Share this Notice with Other Players and Their Families

For More Information and to Register for Benefits:

1-855-887-3485 or www.NFLConcussionSettlement.com



AFTER THE STORM

BY LARS ANDERSON

Photograph by
Nicholas Kamm
AFP/Getty Images

In the three years since one of the most devastating tornadoes in Alabama history ravaged Tuscaloosa, the university and the football community have helped the town rebuild and reached out to comfort families who lost loved ones. But the pain lingers



XXXXXX



TRAGIC SCENE

The T-Town tornado, which touched down on the afternoon of April 27, 2011, resulted in 53 deaths and more than \$1 billion in property damage.



LORYN BROWN was about to step into her Crimson-colored dream. Ever since she was three years old and growing up in Tuscaloosa, she had wanted to attend Alabama.

On the morning of April 27, 2011, Loryn was in her rented three-bedroom house at 51 Beverly Heights in Tuscaloosa, a house shaded by oak and pine trees that stretched 80 feet into the sky; Loryn shared the place with two roommates. Her final test of the semester at nearby Shelton State Community College was later that evening. Loryn, 21, wanted to become a sports broadcaster, and she had already been accepted at Alabama, where she intended to enroll the coming fall. Her plan for the day was to study in the house, then drive the two miles to the Shelton State campus for her 6:30 exam.

The crimson ran deep in Loryn's blood. Her father, Shannon Brown, had been a backup defensive lineman on the Tide's 1992 national championship squad and a team captain in '95. Loryn, who'd been born when her father and mother, Ashley, were students at Stanhope Elmore High in Millbrook, Ala., never missed a home game. Wearing her daddy's jersey, she'd sit on her mother's lap in Bryant-Denny Stadium and point at her father on the field. After the games she'd wait outside the locker room with her mom and run into her daddy's arms as soon as she spotted him. He was her hero.

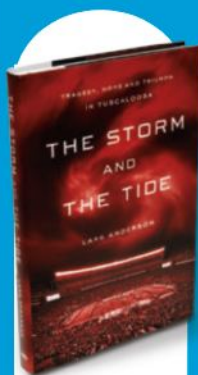
Loryn, with her dark curly hair and dimpled cheeks, even melted the heart of Alabama coach Gene Stallings, a notorious curmudgeon. Before the Sugar Bowl game against Miami that would decide the '92 national title—underdog Alabama would defeat the No. 1 Hurricanes 34–13—Loryn dined with the Tide at the pregame meal in their New Orleans hotel. Loryn had just learned the “show-your-food trick,” as her mother called it, and midway through the meal she stood on her chair and yelled out, “Hey, Coach Stallings!” Once she had the coach's attention, Loryn, dressed in an Alabama cheerleader's outfit, opened her mouth wide to show the piece of steak she was chewing. The coach nearly fell out of his chair in a fit of laughter. The moment lightened the mood, and some players would later swear that it relaxed the team. Nearly two decades later, she was still the consummate fan.

Like so many people throughout Alabama, Loryn had awakened early in the morning of April 27 to crackling thunder. The power in the house had flickered on and off. She called her mother, Ashley Mims, now remarried and living in Wetumpka, Ala., a town about two hours to the southeast. Loryn always phoned her mom when storms threatened. “Mama, can you pull up the weather on your phone?” Loryn

1.5
miles, the
maximum
width of the
Tuscaloosa
tornado. Its
wind speeds
reached an
estimated
190 mph.

× × × × × × × ×

122
tornadoes that
formed across
five Southern
states on
April 27, 2011,
an outbreak
that caused
more than
300 deaths.



Excerpted from
**THE STORM
AND THE TIDE**

by Lars
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asked. “We’re having a bad storm. What’s going on?”

Ashley Mims looked at her phone. There was a triangle-shaped storm over Tuscaloosa, but it appeared small. “Oh, baby, you’ll be fine,” she said. “It will blow over in a minute.” She was right.

But a few hours later she read another weather report. This one suggested that conditions in Tuscaloosa would be favorable for tornadoes later in the afternoon. Ashley asked Loryn if she should come pick her up. “No, Mama,” Loryn said. “I don’t want you to get stuck somewhere. I don’t want you on the road. I’ll be fine.”

For the rest of the afternoon, Loryn stayed in her bedroom, cramming for her exam. From her living



room, Loryn's mother flipped between news stations, which had cameras mounted in downtown Tuscaloosa. At 5:12, her heart jackhammering with fear, Ashley called her daughter. “Baby, it’s coming right at you!” she said in a panicked voice. “Get your head down.”

“Mama, I’m scared,” Loryn said.

Loryn and her friends moved to a center hallway on the first floor of the house, with her mother still on the phone. Ashley could hear Will Stevens, a close friend who had come over, telling Loryn and her roommate Danielle Downs that everything would be fine, that they had to have faith, that they needed to be strong.

“It’s going to be O.K., baby,” Ashley told her daughter over the phone. “It’s going to be O.K.”

“I’m scared, Mama,” Loryn said, clutching a pillow over her head. “It’s just black outside. It’s just black.”

Then the line went dead. It was 5:13 p.m.

JUST PAST 6 P.M. on the day of the storm, Shannon Brown called his ex-wife. Shannon was at his home outside of Huntsville in Madison, Ala., 150 miles to the northeast of Tuscaloosa; he was now the football coach at Ardmore High, and remarried with two other children. “Have



you heard from Loryn?” Shannon asked.

“I was on the phone with her, and it cut off,” Ashley replied, shaken.

“Ashley, I’m sure she’s O.K.,” Shannon said.

“Shannon, if she was O.K., she’d crawl out of the rubble to let her mama know that she was fine.”

After hanging up, Shannon phoned Diane Rumanek, the mother of Loryn’s other roommate, Kelli, and the owner of the house they rented. “Can you go to the house and call me back?” Shannon asked. “We’re getting worried.”

Rumanek phoned later that evening with bad news. “I’m sorry, Shannon,” she said. “I can’t get there. The streets are blocked with trees and power

on the south side of the Quad, the vast green lawn in the heart of campus. His prints would join those of all the other Crimson Tide team captains. On the day of the ceremony, Shannon carried his daughter, resplendent in a blue dress with yellow sunflowers and her dark curls, to the Chimes. He set her down and placed his left hand in the soft, wet cement. Loryn crawled next to her daddy and helped him press his fingers down. Afterward, holding Loryn, Shannon spoke to a crowd of several thousand. “I just want to thank Coach Stallings for taking a chance on me,” Shannon said. “I was married and I had this little girl, and that didn’t stop Coach from asking me to come here. I’ll forever be grateful.”



“I’m scared, Mama,” Loryn said, clutching a pillow. “It’s just black outside. **IT’S JUST BLACK.**” Then the line went dead. It was 5:13 p.m.

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ALABAMA BOND

Shannon’s biggest fan during his career as a Tide defensive lineman, Loryn (near left) helped him leave his mark at the Chimes in 1996 and counted the days to the team’s home opener each year.

lines. I thought everyone was fine. I had no idea. It looks like a bomb went off.”

Shannon’s father, Jerry Brown, lives 40 miles south of Tuscaloosa in Greensboro and owns a company called Blackbelt Tree Service. Having learned that no one could reach Loryn, Jerry hitched up his tree-cutting equipment; if necessary, he would carve a path to reach his granddaughter’s house. Before long, Jerry and his grandson Chad Richey were driving to Tuscaloosa to find Shannon’s little girl.

Shannon was a mess of jangled nerves. His hands trembled and his legs shook as he prepared to leave home for Tuscaloosa. His thoughts drifted back to the last phone conversation he’d had with Loryn. She had recently informed him that she planned on majoring in journalism at Alabama. Shannon had made a deal with her: If she made good grades, he would take care of her financial needs. “I am so proud of you,” Shannon had told her. “I love you so much.”

“You have no idea how much that means to me,” Loryn had replied. “I love you too, Daddy.”

When Shannon was named a team captain for the 1995 season, it meant he would be able to leave a permanent mark on Tuscaloosa by putting his handprint and footprint in cement at the base of Denny Chimes—a 118-foot bell tower built in 1929

Loryn, as she grew older, typically started her personal countdown to Alabama’s opening game of the season in April. From Tuscaloosa she would tell Ashley over the phone, “Mama, it’s only 127 days until game day!” On fall Saturdays, Loryn would always stop by the Chimes to place her hand in her father’s print. Nothing made her happier.

JERRY BROWN and Chad Richey arrived in Tuscaloosa at dusk; downed trees and power lines blocked many of the roads into town. The men hacked their way toward

× × × Loryn’s house on Beverly Heights. Power in the area was out, leaving the neighborhood dark and unrecognizable. Even the police were barricaded by the debris; seeing Jerry and his equipment, the officers encouraged him to continue his work. Jerry was determined to reach his granddaughter.

By the time Shannon arrived in the area, a police blockade prevented him from getting near Loryn’s house. Shannon demanded that the police let him through. “My daughter is in there,” he pleaded. Eventually one of the officers escorted the distraught father to his daughter’s house.

There, in the back of an ambulance, Shannon saw two bodies carefully wrapped in blankets. (He would soon learn that they were the bodies of Downs and Stevens.) Just then an officer, driving a small utility tractor, pulled up. Another casualty was wrapped in a green comforter in the back of the vehicle. An officer approached Shannon with

photos on a digital camera, photos of the three victims from the house, and asked Shannon if he would look at them to see if one was his daughter. He took the camera in his quaking hands, and as soon as he saw the dark curly hair, the devastating reality came crashing down on him.

Shannon stumbled backward. He screamed, producing a wail so loud it may well have carried all the way to Bryant-Denny. He swung his fists, wanting to hit something, anything. His father grabbed him and hugged his son tighter than he ever had before. In that instant something deep inside Shannon Brown left him, escaping into the nighttime air, never to return.

No one could say anything to Shannon now that would really matter. How could they? There was no meaningful relief from the pain he was feeling. He had trouble remembering things he'd done five minutes earlier and felt as if he were merely drifting about in the world, emotionless and empty. So when a private number popped up on his cell a few days later he considered not answering. But for some reason he lifted the phone to his ear and said, "Hello?"

"Shannon, this is Nick Saban," said the voice on the other end of the line. "I'm so, so sorry for your loss. There's nothing I can say that will make you feel any better, but just know that the entire Alabama family is here for you. You're a great ambassador for us. If there is anything that I can ever do for you, please call me. I'm here for you, Shannon. You call me, you hear?"

Brown was moved. Here was Saban, whom he barely knew, reminding him that he wasn't alone, that the arms of his football family were extended. The call was like a shot of adrenaline—Saban's voice did make him feel momentarily better, but the pain quickly returned, still crippling in intensity.

There were others from the Alabama family who reached out to Shannon. The phone calls were heartfelt, and appreciated. Still, Shannon felt a darkness closing in around him. His girl was gone, and no words could change that. He didn't want to go out. He didn't want to see people who would try to console him. He just wanted to be alone.

I F THERE WERE a statute of limitations on grief, Shannon Brown would have welcomed it. Six months after his daughter's death, he still caught himself searching for her face in a crowd, still turned expectantly when he thought he heard her voice come out of thin air.

The day before Alabama's Oct. 8 game against Vanderbilt, Shannon packed an overnight bag at his home in Madison and began the 2½-hour



HIGHER GOAL

Throughout the 2011 season, Saban (with the BCS trophy) urged his team to play for Tuscaloosa. The Tide bought in, winning the school's second national title in three years and bringing a bit of joy to the heartbroken city.

drive to Tuscaloosa. Traveling this same road had once been charged with anticipation; now it elicited conflicting emotions. He really didn't like spending time in T-Town anymore; invariably he would be stricken by the image of himself identifying Loryn's body. But he also missed seeing his teammates. The five years he'd spent playing football at Alabama were some of the best of his life, and even now there was some comfort in remembering those days with his buddies, recalling the whole-body shiver of excitement that came with running out in front of 80,000

roaring fans. As he neared Tuscaloosa he just felt scared—scared that the bad memories would simply overwhelm the good ones.

During Shannon's junior year at Alabama, when Loryn was four, he and Ashley had divorced; they'd married so young, too young, and it wasn't working anymore. But they shared their devotion to Loryn, and whenever Alabama had an open date during the season, Shannon would take his daughter to the zoo or jump on a trampoline with her or even join her to play with her Barbie dolls. For the rest of his college career he spent every other weekend with his daughter.

Now he checked into the Hotel Capstone—the same place he used to stay with his teammates before games—and after dropping off his bags, he walked to the Quad for a barbecue under a tent on this cool, bright afternoon. The old stories flowed even as dusk settled and the temperature dropped. To Brown, it felt almost like being with the guys back in the locker room again.

Almost. Several of Loryn's friends stopped by the tent. They hugged Shannon tight, and each time he didn't want to let go; each time it gave



him the sensation that he was embracing his daughter. The girls talked about everything they missed most about Loryn: her great laugh, her sassiness, her kindness.

At 10 a.m. that Saturday, 300 people filled Moody Hall. Shannon and Ashley walked onto the stage and were presented with a certificate from the University of Alabama Alumni Association. It stated that the Loryn Alexandria Brown Memorial Scholarship had achieved endowed status that would carry on in perpetuity. Shannon and Ashley had worked diligently to raise money, getting generous donations from alumni, friends and family, for a scholarship that would cover the cost of a student's freshman year; it had brought them closer than they'd been in almost two decades.

On the stage Shannon said, "It feels so good to know that Loryn is now forever at Alabama. We had so many wonderful times together here. This would mean so much to her."

After the ceremony Shannon strolled over to Denny Chimes. A breeze ruffled the orange and yellow leaves on the grand oaks that shaded the Quad. It was difficult being here at the Chimes, but he also felt the presence of Loryn. He stayed until it was time to go to the stadium.

Five minutes before kickoff, the stadium was full, and Shannon walked onto the field. He had been named an honorary team captain for this game, and as he waited on the sideline for the coin toss ceremony to begin, running back Trent Richardson came over and shook his hand. Shannon said, "Hey, buddy, good luck. Don't ever underestimate this experience."

"No, sir, I won't," Richardson replied. "I thank the good Lord every day."

Shannon trotted out to midfield, where he joined Alabama game captains Dont'a Hightower, Mark Barron, Marquis Maze and Alex Watkins. Before the referee flipped the coin, the announcer introduced Shannon and told the crowd that his daughter Loryn had died in the tornado. The introduction brought 101,000 fans to their feet, and they clapped and whistled, a resounding salute. Shannon had a familiar sensation, the back-of-the-neck hair-raising rush he'd felt so often on this field as a player. He stepped forward in his houndstooth sport coat and red tie and lifted his right arm to acknowledge the crowd. But there was no smile.

Back on the Alabama sideline, Shannon could feel something different about this team. He had gone through training camp in 1996 with the Falcons before a knee injury ended his career, but he

had been around the NFL long enough to know that those players never had the look in their eyes that these Alabama kids did. Everyone on this Tide team exuded a passion and an intensity that Shannon had never before seen, not even on his squad that won the national championship in 1992.

For the first time since the tornado, Ashley Mims was also at Bryant-Denny. Before kickoff, as she watched her ex-husband being honored below, she thought, of course, of Loryn sitting in her lap in her cheerleading uniform as they rooted for Daddy down on the field.

By halftime she had to leave. "It's just too hard," she told a companion. "As exciting as it is being back here, it's too much. I just can't stay. I can't."

S HANNON DECIDED TO throw a party, albeit a small one. Even the smallest steps were moving him in the direction of healing. He invited a few of his close friends × × × to come to his house on Jan. 9, 2012, the night of the title game. There was zero doubt in his mind that Alabama would win, and with relative ease, he thought. (He was right: The Tide avenged its only loss of the season, beating LSU 21-0.) The Tide had been given a second chance against LSU, and Brown understood exactly what that would mean to the team. "The tornado made this season personal to the players and to Saban," Shannon told his friends. "I saw it in their eyes

"I saw it in their eyes," Shannon told his friends. **THEY KNEW THEY COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE** and give Tuscaloosa something to be proud of."

when I was on the field for the homecoming game. They knew they could make a difference and give Tuscaloosa something to be proud of. There is *no way* they're going to let Tuscaloosa down."

His friends, of course, wanted to know how he was holding up. Shannon hadn't sought professional help, but there were signs of improvement. Best of all was being around his two other children. As for his oldest daughter, he told his friends, "It's not easy. It will never be easy. I just hope no one has to go through what Loryn's mother and I have gone through."

He settled into a living room chair and waited for kickoff. For three hours he could lose himself. □



Year of Living Jameis-ly

→ BY MICHAEL ROSENBERG



You will never, ever see a college football phenomenon like

Johnny Manziel again, as long as you stop watching the sport this month. Otherwise, get ready. Here's Johnny, the 2014 version: Florida State quarterback Jameis Winston. Like Johnny Football at Texas A&M last year, Winston is the reigning Heisman Trophy winner, a divisive NFL prospect, a cultural lightning rod and—this seems incidental, but we might as well point it out—a person.

As a redshirt freshman in 2013, Winston led the nation in passer rating and took the Seminoles to the national title. This fall he will be part quarterback, part biology-lab frog. If he has one bad game (one more than he had last season), headline writers will ask, FROM JAMEIS TO JAMEISN'T? His every move will be dissected.

"That will be his life," says Charlie Ward, who won the Heisman as Florida State's quarterback 20 years before Winston did. "That is part of being a Heisman[-winning] returning quarterback. When that happens, he'll live up to it. He's ready."

Ward, who coaches football at Booker T. Washington High in Pensacola, has been mentoring Winston, and he can tell you what's right with Jameis: "He should be able to graduate [ahead of his class],

which very few people talk about." Also, Winston has handled hype before. Last summer Seminoles fans were buzzing about him before he took a snap; it is a sign of our times, perhaps, that his nickname was Famous Jameis before he was famous.

Winston's play can withstand the scrutiny. But in the public's view, if not the police's, he is one transgression from being a permanent Character Question. Winston has been accused of crimes both serious and comic. In December 2012 a Florida State student accused him of sexual assault, and the investigation was mishandled by either the Tallahassee police or the Florida State boosters' club. (I can never remember which.) No charges were pressed.

Then, this off-season, Winston was accused of stealing crab legs from a Publix supermarket; he got a shoplifting citation, but it was only a misdemeanor, which offended the crabs. The lobsters are still laughing. As collegiate idiocy goes, this was pretty minor, but it did make you wonder if Winston realizes what's at stake for him.

There are fair concerns about Winston, as both a leader and a man, and I expect them to be discussed ad nauseam. The conversation about Winston will be twisted, stretched and spun around, the way it

There are fair concerns about Winston, as both a leader and a man, and they will be discussed ad nauseam this college football season.



Will Jameis Winston repeat as the Heisman winner?

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was with Manziel last year. At the Charlie Ward Mentor Leadership Football Camp this summer, Ward says Winston was "throwing water balloons with the kids, dumping water on kids, allowing them to dump water on him. That's the kind of person he is." Pundits will ask, Does this make Winston a sweetheart or immature? That debate can fill a half hour, easy, and longer if we find out some of the water balloons were in Florida Gators colors.

Somewhere in Tallahassee the actual Winston will wake up every morning and live his life. His mentor thinks he will do it well. Ward's main advice to the kids at his camp was to be themselves. Winston lived that advice last spring, when he played baseball for Florida State primarily because he wanted to. Some prospects play minor league ball for thousands of dollars between football seasons. Winston pitched 33⅓ innings for Florida State for fun and gave up just four runs.

Perhaps it was unwise to risk injury (and NFL millions) by throwing fastballs all spring, but Ward sees it differently. He, too, was a multisport star, and he went on to a long career in the NBA. He is proud of how he juggled hoops and football. "When Jameis looks back 10, 15 years from now, he'll be grateful he played baseball and football," Ward says. "You only get three or four years to do it. More than likely, that will be the only time you have to play multiple sports."

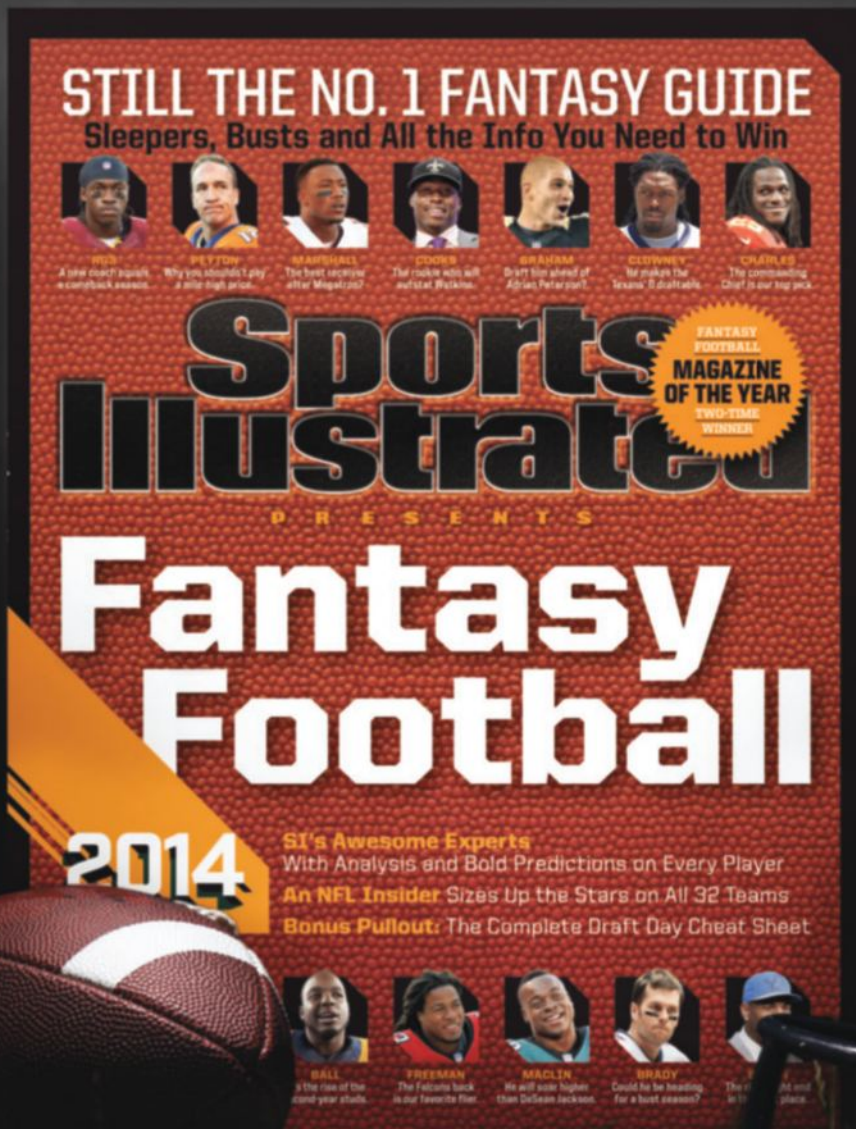
By next year's NFL draft, Winston will have to grow up. Some will say that is too late. Others will say, Take your time. What would Johnny Football say? Hang on, we're trying to get him on the set. □

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